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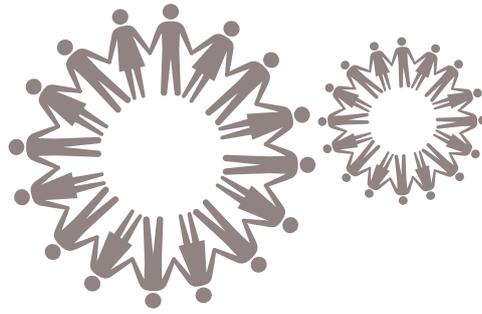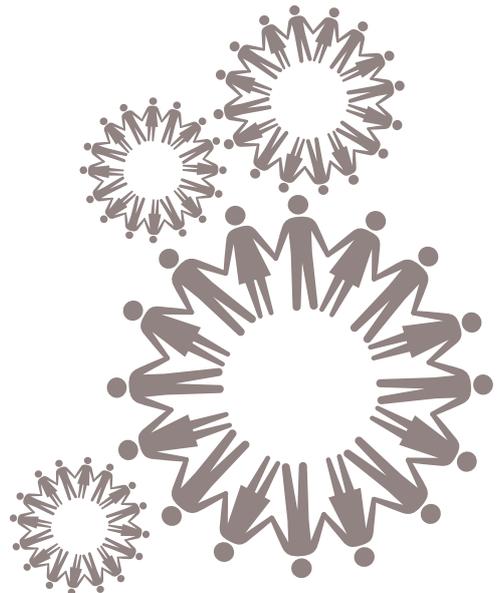
WE NEED.

RESEARCH TO SUPPORT THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE RED CROSS RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT COMMITMENTS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

IT'S TIME TO ACT.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Effective community engagement helps to ensure that humanitarian organizations are more accountable to the people they serve. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is firmly rooted in local communities, and is committed to being accountable to communities as established in the Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief. Most recently, the Movement has increased its efforts to meet its commitments to improve how it engages with and is accountable to local communities through the Movement Commitments on Community Engagement and Accountability presented at the 2019 Council of Delegates. Furthermore, over the years the Movement has developed a robust set of resources, such as a guide and toolkit, that seek to support National Societies to strengthen their practices of engaging with local communities Yet, even with a wealth of resources and commitments a variety of barriers and challenges still exist in institutionalizing a consistent approach that ensures that community engagement is an integral part of all responses.

To understand these gaps in application, the IFRC in partnership with CDA Collaborative Learning (CDA)[1] undertook joint research, which investigated the practical experience of Movement members[2] to institutionalize community engagement approaches across their programmes and operations. This final report consolidates the learning from this research project. It articulates the challenges that Movement member experience in institutionalizing a community-led approach and then uses this evidence to substantiate assumptions about the value and impact of community engagement and participation.

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1. For more see: http://cdacollaborative.org
2. Africa Movement members engaged in this process as part of the IFRC CEA Africa Roadmap. The Roadmap engaged over 400 people from IFRC, ICRC, Partner National Societies, and Africa National Societies, and included in-depth visits to the Sudan Red Crescent, Malawi Red Cross, Burundi Red Cross, and the Nigeria Red Cross. To achieve a more global perspective interviews were conducted with global movement members and in-depth visits to the Italian Red Cross and the Ukraine Red Cross.

What is Community Engagement and Accountability?

Community engagement includes processes to systematically listen to, engage and communicate with people and communities in order to better understand their diverse needs, vulnerabilities and capacities; to gather, respond to and act on feedback and input about their priorities and preferences; and to provide safe and equitable access and opportunities to actively participate in decisions that affect them.

Accountability refers to the mutual responsibility of all components of the Movement to use their power and resources ethically and responsibly to put the interests of people and communities they aim to serve at the center of decision-making, thereby ensuring that humanitarian actions lead to the best possible outcomes and results for them, while protecting and preserving their rights and dignity and increasing their resilience to face situations of vulnerability and crisis.

WHY THIS RESEARCH?

Decades of evidence demonstrates the harm that can occur when local needs, voices, and perspectives are not integrated into the design, planning, implementing, monitoring, and exiting of programmes and operations. And yet, many organizations still struggle to place local voice and choice at the centre of the work.

In fact, recent data from Ground Truth Solutions across seven countries, show that **75% of people surveyed say that the aid they receive does not meet their most pressing needs**.[3] Without strong approaches to community engagement, organizations can find a lack of quality in their programmes which in turn undermines existing local capacities, deteriorate community trust and acceptance, threaten to safe access to communities, offer irreverent, or worse conflict-inducing services, and or create financial and reputational risks for the organization and its staff.[4]
Why, with everything learned about the harm that can come when local understanding and voice are not central to the work, do we still make the same mistakes? And why does the lack of local engagement and inclusion of community voice remain a major problem in our efforts to respond?

These questions are at the core of this research as it seeks to understand the wide-range of perceptions of Movement members. It fills the gaps in knowledge about the impact of implementing a community engagement approach across all programmes and operations. It also offers greater understanding of the value of community-led approaches through more robust evidence that supplements the Movement Commitments on Community Engagement and Accountability.

As a starting point, the IFRC conducted a desk review to identify key assumptions from across the Movement about the value and impact of using a community-driven approach. These assumptions were gathered through an analysis of Movement members' evaluations and gray literature from the Movement about the ways in which community engagement has impacted the organization's programmes and operations and the communities severed by the Red Cross. They offer insights to how community engagement can work at field-level, inform advocacy, and build a formal theory of change. The assumptions tested[5] include:

1. **If** accountability increases (cause), then trust in Red Cross Red Crescent staff will increase (effect).[6]
2. **If** programming becomes more user-driven (cause), **then** programme sustainability will increase (effect).[7]
3. **If** communities become more empowered, knowledgeable, skilled, and connected (cause), **then** they will become safer and more resilient (effect).[8]
4. Before and during disasters, **if** timely, trusted and actionable life-saving information is provided (cause), **then** lives will be saved (effect).[9]

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3. Ground Truth Solutions, Humanitarian Voice Index, 7,000 people surveyed.
4. For more see: *Briefing note on the Evidence of Impact*.
5. These assumptions were developed by Gabriel Pictet (IFRC) and Carla Hoyer (consultant).
6. *Under the condition* that dialogue platforms and feedback/complaints mechanisms are accessible, feedback is continuously acted upon, all feedback is kept confidential and RCRC staff "does no harm" with the information received.
7. *Under the condition* that there is enough time, flexible funding and community ownership for the project, gender and diversity approaches are included in every step of the programme, programmes continue to demonstrate value, and there is not an emergency breakout.
8. *Under the condition* that they are open to reviewing unhealthy practices and behaviors, they have support from local/national governments, RCRC and other humanitarian actors, and gender and diversity approaches are included in every step of the programme.
9. *Under the condition* that there is prior assessment of the best communication channels, there is enough time to spread early warning messages and reach out to remote populations, there is pre-disaster planning, and shelters and other places of safety are prepared to receive a great amount of people.

Psychosocial support provided by Red Cross volunteers in Fiji to people affected by Cyclone Winston, 2016.

These assumptions were then tested against the perspectives of Movement members from across the globe – including staff, volunteers, and community members. Experiences and perspectives were gathered through remote and in-person key informant interviews as well as in-country workshops convened in Sudan, Burundi, Malawi, Nigeria, Ukraine, and Italy.[10] In-country workshops focused on identifying the barriers and enabling factors that advance or hinder efforts to mainstream community-led approaches within the National Society.[11]

These discussions offered insights into the opportunities and challenges that remain for institutionalizing community engagement into Movement member's work, and provided evidence about the factors that enable the assumptions about value and impact. Evidence gathered with Africa National Societies, came from an ongoing participatory learning project conducted jointly by CDA-IFRC Africa Region that developed a Roadmap to mainstream community-led approaches across the Region.[12]

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10. A full list of participants can be found in Annex A.

11. Individual Roadmaps for strengthening community engagement in their National Society were developed for each National Society as a direct output of this project and the IFRC Africa Roadmap.

12. See forthcoming: Cechvala, Sarah, Robillard, Sabina, and Sharon Reader. Forthcoming. "A Roadmap to Strengthen Community Engagement and Accountability in Africa 2019-2023." CDA Collaborative Learning and International Federation of the Red Cross.

WHY DO WE QUESTION THE IMPACT?

Movement members who engaged in this research consistently discussed a discernable gap in evidence to demonstrate the impact and outcomes that come from using a community-led approach. Many argued that the lack of Movement-specific evidence makes it difficult to build awareness among decisions-makers, who make the case for greater investment in community participation and engagement. While many members acknowledged the wealth of existing evidence that links increased community participation to more robust outcomes, they noted that existing evidence is:

• Not directly about the experience of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, and therefore less relevant to member's work; and/or

• Not packaged or framed adequately to make the case to the right audience. In particular, evidence is often packaged or presented in way that **does not** help decision-makers make sense of the information or its purpose. Therefore, it becomes challenging for leaders to use the information as an advocacy tool for more relevant, responsive, and effective programmes and operations.

It is true that evidence about the impact of greater community participation can, at times, be hard to see, document, and communicate. Community engagement is intangible (unlike shelter or food aid) and is **cross-cutting (not a stand-alone project)**, and so it can be challenging to capture its impacts in the moment and explain it to busy colleagues.

Evaluating the impact of community participation is further disadvantaged when organizations do not measure engagement and participation in monitoring and evaluation systems. In fact, Movement members noted that such topics are not currently part of the metrics for assessing programme quality, effectiveness, or relevance.

There are also few accountability mechanisms that monitor and address institutional accountability to communities. Even with recent progress by many donors to require organizations to have feedback mechanisms, there are few, if any indicators, related to responsiveness and adaptations that are made based on **using** the community's feedback. Weak accountability to donors is then perpetuated internally and among agencies.

"How do we capture [community engagement] in a way that makes it speak for itself. We have a lot of evidence of what happens when we don't engage the community, and what can go wrong. Maybe there is not enough understanding of what community engagement is. All too often when we try to explain it is too narrow but then when it is too broad it is scary because it encompasses everything."
IFRC STAFF EUROPE REGION

As one IFRC colleague explains in a blog, *"The heads of humanitarian agencies generally don't ask [for community feedback]. Senior management are often more concerned with the implementation rate (or, more accurately, burn rate) to avoid the cardinal sin of having to return funds to a donor. Even when leadership does signal that accountability to communities is important, often this doesn't go much beyond paying it lip service."*[13] *Lines of accountability to communities can also challenge how power and decisions are structured in our organization.* Power dynamics and rigid institutional structures can further make it difficult to translate evidence from other programmes or even outside institutions into one's own.

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13. Reader, Sharon. 2018. "Do humanitarian agencies really NEED to be accountable to communities?" IFRC Blog.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE TELL US ABOUT OUR ASSUMPTIONS?

This research intends to address some of these gaps in Movement specific evidence and institutional accountability systems. It offers insights into the features that enable the four assumptions related to the impact of greater accountability to those served by our programmes and operations. Evidence from the field research and key informant interviews create a strong argument for the value and impact of increased community engagement.

ASSUMPTION #1: IF ACCOUNTABILITY INCREASES, THEN TRUST IN RCRC STAFF WILL INCREASE.

To understand this assumption, it is key to acknowledge what it means to be accountable and what increased trust means in practice. It is then important to consider institutional and external factors might enable increased accountability and trust between the Red Cross and communities.

What is accountability?
According to the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, which is now part of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS Alliance), the definition of accountability is *"the means through which power is used responsibly. It is a process of taking into account the views of, and being held accountable by different stakeholders, and primarily the people affected by authority or power."*[14] As explained in an ALNAP study, this definition largely relates to power, but not shared power and, *"rather than focusing on 'empowerment', is concerned primarily with ensuring that the power of humanitarian aid agencies is used responsibly."*[15] Many organizations, including the Movement, utilize accountability frameworks and mechanisms – such as feedback systems – as an insurance mechanisms for greater accountability.

"Increasing accountability", in this case means improving how the Movement listens, responds and uses community input, advice, and feedback in all its decision-making processes. Evidence demonstrates that when organizations gather but don't use or respond to community members they become disinterested, disenfranchised, and often disengaged or frustrated with the organization, its staff, programmes, and/or operations.[16] During a visit to a National Society for this research, community members explained that while staff try to be responsive to their feedback, they often say they will respond and then never do. **Lack of responsiveness to feedback was described as a barrier to building trust with staff and volunteers**. One male community member explained, *"It's not easy to talk with staff. They always say they can talk later."* **A female community member noted, "They [RCRC] never listen, so I don't trust anyone."** Volunteers also expressed skepticism that feedback would be responded to or used by the Red Cross. One volunteer said, *"There are millions of feedback given to the office and I believe it won't change anything on a big scale. But on a small scale maybe."* This experience was echoed in the 2015 Humanitarian

14. HAP. (2010) The 2010 HAP standard in accountability and quality management. Geneva: HAP International.
15. Brown, Dayna, and Antonio Donino. 2014. *Rhetoric or Reality? Putting Affected People at the Centre of Humanitarian Action.* London: ALNAP/ODI: p. 14.
16. For example see: Bonino, Francesca, with Isabella Jean, and Paul Knox Clarke. 2014. *Closing the Loop: Effective Feedback in Humanitarian Contexts, Practitioner Guidance.* London: ALNAP-CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

Accountability Report which explained, that even though people who receive aid are often unable to take their business elsewhere, as people do in an open market, lack of trust can deteriorate relationships and lead to people disengaging from programmes. [17]

Accountability however is not just ensuring that community feedback is gathered and used once programmes have started; but that community members' experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities are central to the organization's understanding of the context in which they're operating and permeates all aspects and phases of programmes and operations.

What does trust look like in practice?
In an recent blog, Hugo Slim explains describes trust as, *"…partly emotional and partly calculative. It is a feeling and a rational evaluation. Even if I do not know something for certain and cannot entirely predict if it is possible, I may trust a person or an organization to try and achieve it. I believe in them and decide it is worth giving them a chance. I take a risk on them."* He continues by stating, *"…trust is fundamental to humanitarian work and that we will not succeed, or even exist, without the trust of everyone involved in humanitarian action."*[18]

When trust is cultivated with communities, it facilitates acceptance and ensures access. This is often seen as one of the primary contributions of community engagement because stronger community trust has other far-reaching impacts on humanitarian programming. During a visit to one National Society for this research, volunteers noted that gaps in communication and accountability had degraded the relationship and the trust, not only between the volunteers and the National Society, but between the community and the National Society. One volunteer explained, *"People do not have trust that we will react to their needs. That's why they lose hope."*

A recent analysis by Ground Truth Solutions demonstrates that there is a strong relationship between trust and programme outcomes (e.g. whether aid meets needs, and goes to those who most need it; whether people were satisfied with the education provided; whether assistance would help them to live without aid in the future; whether they felt well-informed about assistance available; whether life was improving; and their perceptions of safety). This study noted that, *"people with high trust were **twice as likely** to agree that aid meets their needs and will help them to live without aid in the future."*

What factors enable increased accountability and increased trust?
Other variables must be factored into understanding what enables both increased accountability and trust. This research observed a number of key factors that supported greater accountability and therefore trust between the National Society, communities, and volunteers.
• *Leadership* – In National Societies where leadership actively supports community engagement there is a strong momentum to institutionalize accountability approaches. In these cases, it is clear that the establishment of internal accountability systems by leaders facilitates stronger, external accountability to communities, partners, and peers. Not only

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17. See: Nick van Praag, 'Would you Recommend this Aid programme to a friend?' in CHS, *Humanitarian Accountability Report*, 2015.
18. Slim, Hugo. 2019. 'Trust me, I'm a Humanitarian', Humanitarian Law and Policy, IFRC Blogs, October 24th 2019.

was this observed in inclusion of the approach in policy and practice, but also in leadership's participation in community engagement related activities. To foster change from within an institution requires leadership and responsibility at all levels.[19] This includes **how leaders model accountability, value community perspective, engage in accountability-related opportunities, and resource accountability initiatives.**[20] For example, in the Ukraine Red Cross (URCS), senior management expressed a deep commitment to improving internal and external accountability mechanisms to enhance their programmatic work with communities. Support from management to advance CEA across the URCS' programmes and operations has been essential for garnering staff buy-in while also setting the tone and precedent that this approach is fundamentally the way in which the Red Cross works.

• *Adapt the message* – Strengthening mechanisms for institutional accountability is often the responsibility of leaders. However, leaders often do not have the evidence or information to advocate for improved accountability. The research found that **making the case for improved accountability is most successful when framed around issues that are relevant and important in the context and to the organization**. It takes creativity to capture and communicate what effective participation actually looks like – it is not like a food distribution or emergency shelter. An IFRC staff member in Latin America noted, *"We need to document this [evidence of impact for learning] in a compelling way. For example, we brought evidence that 99% of our Cash Transfer Programme funding was going to buy schoolbooks. This type of information is power and helps us learn and build better programmes."* Such practices can help the Movement to have stronger evidence about best practices and the positive impact of community-led programming can have on the quality of the work.

• *Alignment with other initiatives* – Institutionalizing approaches to greater community accountability are often **strengthened when they align with wider organizational strategy development or institutional change initiatives**. For example, the Canadian Red Cross (CRCS) was able to accelerate its commitments for greater inclusion of Indigenous Peoples into its programs, because of, as one staff person noted, *"a perfect storm"*. This 'storm' included multiple policy level changes and additional financial resources within the Canadian Government that catalyzed change in the CRCS. The momentum of both processes created the right moment to address mistakes by the CRCS with the indigenous community. One staff member noted, *"These changes forced change within the organization. The Red Cross could no longer sit in place. Now, we walk all staff through community engagement and indigenous peoples framework. While our systems and processes are not yet aligned, it gives us a wonderful place to strive for."*

• *Systems are necessary* – Inclusion of accountability mechanisms into internal strategies and policies creates opportunities for enhanced engagement and accountability with communities. Incorporating these into the way working sets a standard and can offer incentives for increased accountability to communities. The

What happens where there are no systems?

Lack of institutional systems related to accountability was a challenge for many of the National Societies visited for this research. In one case, limited interest and understanding by leaders about increased tools for accountability meant that they were not included in the organization's strategy and were not seen as an organizational priority. Staff of this National Society noted that it is difficult to embed accountability mechanism into programmes and operations because there is not standardized approach or SOPs for how to integrate or budget for it into programmes

19. Brown, Dayna. 2018. "Participation of Crisis-Affected People in Humanitarian Decision-Making processes." The Humanitarian Accountability Report: 2018 Edition: CHS Alliance.
20. For more see: Change in the hand of leaders: Briefing Note: The role of leaders in improving accountability to communities.

few times that the research team observed requirements to be accountable to local people being clearly articulated in organizational systems and processes, there were more robust programme quality and strengthened trust between the National Society and communities.

• *Flexibility* – The success of a project or operation is generally predetermined leaving little room to make changes based on local need, input, and/or contextual fluctuations. Trust inevitably grows between communities and organization's when people see changes being made based on their input and concerns. As one Red Cross community member explained, *"If they [Red Cross] listen to us, then we can build a better relationships, and there will they will become more accountable to our needs."*

ASSUMPTION #2: IF PROGRAMMING BECOMES MORE USER-DRIVEN, THEN PROGRAMME SUSTAINABILITY WILL INCREASE.

This assumption suggests that sustainability and resiliency of communities is derived from enhanced ownership and participation by communities in the activities that affect their lives. Key to this assumption is the understanding of: What does it means for programmes to be "user-driven"? How does that approach impact sustainability? And what are the institutional and external features that allows for increased community participation and programme sustainability?

What is "user-driven" programming?

"User-driven" programming goes beyond community engagement or one-way accountability frameworks. Rather, it suggests ownership and client-driven programming, which is more akin to participatory programming. An ALNAP report explains that this type of programming *"engages people in determining various aspects of programming and humanitarian operations. This may include assessing vulnerabilities, needs and capacities, and designing, monitoring and evaluating programmes or specific aspects of humanitarian operations, but does not always include participation in decision-making processes managed by the aid agency or government."*[21]

This means including people and their opinions in programming so that it is more relevant, sustainable, and locally-accepted. Relevance is predicated on **"choice"** and people's ability to determine what will best meet their needs. This is explained in one study, *"giving them [people] the means to decide which of their market-based needs to meet first and what is the most appropriate way of meeting them."*[22] However, this is also about including people's perspectives into the organization's understanding of the context. Effective context analysis[23] builds upon existing knowledge and evidence – including community perspectives. Creating systems to capture, store, analyze, and review local feedback and information can deepen the organization's understanding of the evolving context and the diversity of

21. Brown, Dayna. 2018. "Participation of Crisis-Affected People in Humanitarian Decision-Making processes." The Humanitarian Accountability Report: 2018 Edition: CHS Alliance.

22. Swithern, S. 2019. More Relevant? 10 ways to approach what people really need. ALNAP Paper. London: ODI/ALNAP.

23. For more see: https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/preparing-for-disaster/disaster-preparedness-tools/better-programming-initiative/

needs. It is well documented that when local perspectives are not at the core of context analysis, organizations can do more harm than good with their well-intended programmes and operations.[24]

How does participation enhance sustainability?

Local communities are not helpless: they are resilient, innovative, and adaptable. Inherently, local people often have a better idea of their acute needs in both the short and long term. Far too often, interventions are crafted far away from the crisis – whether it be in a different country, continent, or perhaps in the capital as oppose to the local area impacted by poverty or an emergency. When programmes are designed in this manner they can undercut existing local capacities or duplicate or undermine functioning power systems or local response processes. And in the worst case, they can 'do harm' and create or exacerbate existing tensions and conflict dynamics.

However, when those impacted by the project or emergency are asked to design and support it, evidence shows that they take ownership of the initiative. Local ownership often strengthens community resilience and may extend the life of the project, even after outside support has left. For example, in one case the Chinese Red Cross (CRCS) evaluated their community vulnerability reduction programme and realized that *"communities could have had a greater say in what was done and in what order of priority. In other words, more could have been done to raise communities' awareness and involve them in decision-making."* So, as a way to address this, the CRCS engaged in participatory exercises that involved *"mapping risks and gaining a perspective on a village's history of disaster to understand traditional coping and survival strategies. Based on what emerges from the assessment, the community develops its own tailored disaster preparedness plan and decides on a disaster risk mitigation project to undertake."*[25] An outcome of this process was that villagers owned and led on various disaster mitigation approaches that they saw as necessary, such as planting on hillsides to prevent landslides, digging wells to prepare for drought, etc.

Lack of Long-Term Community Engagement Can Do Harm During a Crisis

One colleague in the Canadian Red Cross explained that in Canada Indigenous Peoples (IP) are often retraumatized when they are only engaged by organizations during a disaster. In this case, historically IP communities were only asked about their needs during an emergency. However, in an emergency, IPs are often challenged by issues that are reflective of their long-term vulnerabilities, which have been exacerbated by the crisis. So, community members are often forced to recount their marginalization at a time of acute crisis. The staff member noted, *"The community is tired of reframing their needs so that we can understand them….We retraumatize IPs, and actually do harm. The community has to do all the work to say what they actually need in the time of a crisis. The intention is for us to do the right thing, but we have this recurring experience, because we don't know them."* She concluded, *"The community has figured out the best practices for the organization because we cannot figure out our own best practices."* In this example, longer-term and sustained engagement with IP communities have since enabled the organization to increase trust with IP communities and in many ways shifted their programs and operations to be more 'user-driven'.

What factors enable increased "user-driven" programmes and sustainability?

This research observed a number of internal and external factors that can enable greater participation by communities, which can help to create more relevant, responsive, and sustainable programmes and operations.

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24. For more examples see: Anderson, Mary B. 1999. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. Anderson, Mary B., Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean. 2012. *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid.* Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

25. IFRC. Case Study: China and Cambodia: Integrated programming and cooperation with local authorities boost communities' disaster preparedness.

• *Flexible Funding* – Strengthening accountability to communities requires an investment in time to develop relationships and build trust. Community participation cannot simply be tied to one activity, project, or emergency. By providing more stable institutional resources – specified time as well as dedicated budgets – that support activities to include community voice and perspective into the programming can shift the way of working and ensure that community voice is incorporated throughout the programme and beyond.

• *Adaptiveness* – It is possible to find ways to be more agile and dynamic by changing organizational policies and practices, but sometimes it requires donors and partners to provide more flexible conditions for project design and implementation. One report notes, a key challenge is that programme development is rigid and linear, and this process is then embedded into the coordination process, and this is based on the mistaken assumption that *"good quality assessments at the outset of a project will ensure the relevance and effectiveness… throughout its lifespan."*[26] Leaders play a key role in advocating for the flexibility they need to truly be responsive to the communities they serve. Documenting and highlighting cases when donors and programmes are more flexible and the impact this had on the outcomes can also be used to advocate for improved ways of working.

• *Responsiveness* – Being "user-driven" requires organization devolve some power to communities. Organization's need to be willing to adapt and to have institutional mechanisms that allow for changes based on emerging needs or fluctuations in the context. If communities share things that need to change, but the organization is inflexible and cannot or will not make those changes, then communities will eventually get frustrated and stop providing input or using the systems available. For example, in the DRC Ebola response, the IFRC and partners have established a feedback dashboard that allows them to understand community perceptions in real-time. Real-time feedback allows the response efforts to quickly adapt communications and response efforts so they are relevant for the evolving crisis.

• *Human Resources* – Having a staff position that focuses on encouraging "user-driven" programming helps to embed it into strategy, policy and practice. National Societies' noted that while a focal point is necessary, it alone is insufficient. It is crucial that the staff who focus on community engagement have the requisite skill, time, and passion to drive the initiative forward, rather than it being just one of many responsibilities within their portfolio. Adequate human and financial resources are fundamental for success of these positions; otherwise, implementation quickly becomes ad hoc and inconsistent. In the Italian Red Cross, for example, having a focal

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User-driven requires time and flexibility

Planning processes, particularly for emergency operations, often lack the time or financial resources required for proper consultation with communities during the design phase. More often than not, the programme proposal or plan is written in the office, with little involvement of community members. Therefore, proposals do not always take community or volunteer perspectives into account, which goes against the Movement's commitment to engage, listen, and be responsive to local needs. One Nigeria Red Cross staff explained, *"Usually Community Engagement and Accountability is brought in at the end, but it needs to be at the beginning."* An IFRC staff member said, *"When designing the project, we are copying and pasting from previous experience. We do not have time to engage."* This research noted that this is a challenge for several National Societies. In Ukraine, for example, programme funding is for emergency response efforts in the eastern, conflict-affected part of the country. Accountability therefore is largely only built into these programmes as opposed to being applied as an organization-wide approach to working. Incorporation of these mechanism into these programmes is also highly inconsistent and fundamentally dependent upon the donor's interest. Developing and implementing programmes in this way, has made accountability highly project-based, an ad hoc, and with little input from communities.

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26. Swithern, S. 2019. More Relevant? 10 ways to approach what people really need. ALNAP Paper. London: ODI/ALNAP.

point was described as crucial for advancing the topic within organization, and especially among staff within the Migration Programme. One staff explained, *"If [community engagement] is something we want to do seriously, we need to have a point person leading it."* Field staff working at the Migration Center also explained that the focal point has been helpful in raising awareness and providing options about how to more systematically listen to the needs of guests.

• *Inclusivity & Connectivity* – Ensuring participation is not simply a discrete sensitization campaign, or a communications department responsibility, or an emergency-only activity. It is a part of everything that everyone in the Movement does every day, a way of working that reflects values and mission. From the way that front-line volunteers listen to communities to the way procurement evaluates what bids to accept, everyone working for the Movement needs to be engaging with and accountable to communities. For instance, it is no use running a call center unless leadership and procurement are willing to listen to what communities are saying about the quality of goods and services they are receiving, and the themes and implications of feedback collectively. It may be unrealistic to expect front-line field staff to be good at listening and facilitating community participation if human resources did not put those skills in the job description or offer opportunities for existing staff to build their skills.[27] **Organizations are like webs, and one person's ability to be accountable to communities depends on the actions of others**. This is why having an inclusive, holistic, and system-wide approach to community engagement matters.

ASSUMPTION #3: IF COMMUNITIES BECOME MORE EMPOWERED, KNOWLEDGEABLE, SKILLED AND CONNECTED, THEN THEY WILL BECOME SAFER AND MORE RESILIENT.

Inherently this assumption suggests that greater connectivity and inclusion of communities into our work will enable communities to be more resilient and overall safer. Much like assumption #2, devolving power and ownership over our work by supporting the development of local capacities can fundamentally shift the scale of power and facilitate community ownership after Red Cross programmes have ended or an emergency response is over.

What factors facilitate greater empowerment and connectivity to communities?

This research observed a number of internal and external factors that can enable greater empowerment, stronger skills, and more robust local leadership which can improve the resiliency of the society.

• *Build on what works* – The idea of listening to communities is not new for many Movement members. Yet, it is just rarely done in a systematic or holistic way. Establishing practices and policies provides institutions with a solid foundation upon which to build even greater accountability to local people. In Burundi, for example, the legacy of Beneficiary Communications means that many staff are already familiar with activities such as mobile cinema, radio shows, and other information-provision approaches. Building upon

27. For more see: Seris, Nicolas and Chloë Whitley. 2017. "Designing for a Change in Perspective Embracing Client Perspectives in Humanitarian Project Design." International Rescue Committee.

Greater Engagement Provides Safe Access

Within the Sudan Red Crescent, one branch experienced challenges in accessing a particularly conservative community. Through consistent engagement and requests for community input, the branch slowly gained access. Branch leadership praised the community engagement approach and affirmed that it was important in helping them access this community. One branch staff member explained, *"We had a sense of what the community needed before, but now we are accountable to them. Now the community is a partner to us."* A community leader explained, *"In the beginning, we were not listening, they [Sudan Red Crescent] did not speak our language and we did not see their value. But, at the end, we realized that they are here for good. Sudan Red Crescent was very patient and listened and responded to us."*

these existing well-known practices under the banner of 'Community Engagement and Accountability' helps to systematize and formalize what was previously happening organically.

• *Harness communities' desire to engage* – Increasingly, community members understand that they have a right to input into programmes and give feedback about the services that are intended to support them. Throughout this research community members consistently expressed a desire and willingness to more actively participate in Red Cross Red Crescent activities. Harnessing this desire for greater engagement can enhance trust and cultivate meaningful relationships between communities and National Societies, which can impact the organization's ability to access communities safely and reputation, as well as the relevance of programmes.

ASSUMPTION #4: BEFORE AND DURING DISASTERS, IF TIMELY, TRUSTED AND ACTIONABLE LIFE-SAVING INFORMATION IS PROVIDED, THEN LIVES WILL BE SAVED.

This research did not have a specific focus on emergency operations; and therefore, offers less evidence to substantiate the fourth assumption. However, evidence suggests that increased engagement and two-way information sharing offers communities with greater resources and options to respond to the emergency, which can ultimately save lives. One staff member from the Canadian Red Cross explained, "Lack of information creates an oppressive environment, which creates a pathway to vulnerability and does harm."

The Movement's experiences with the DRC Ebola response highlights how increased access to relevant information that responds to actual issues on the ground can improve people's well-being and safety. In this case, years of distrust of outsiders and the government has meant that many community members do not trust health workers. With the Ebola outbreak, community members voiced that they could not see the remains of their loved ones in the opaque body bags used for safe and dignified burials performed by Red Cross volunteers; and therefore, many believed that health workers were lying to them about the whereabouts of their family members, or worse that outside organizations were trafficking their organs. The IFRC and partners first heard these rumors through a robust community feedback system that enabled the operation to rapidly listen and adapt messaging based on community concerns, rumors, and feedback. Based on the concerns related to the body bags, the IFRC was able to shift to transparent body bags, which assuaged community fear, increased trust, and importantly saved lives.[28] This example highlights the value of information for an improved response.

28. Baggio, Ombretta, Abdoulaye Camara, Cheick and Christine Prue. 2019. "Bringing community perspectives to decision-making in the Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of Congo." Humanitarian Practitioners Network, ODI: London, UK.

What factors allow for greater information-sharing between organizations and communities?

This research highlighted several key features that might enable greater opportunities to share actionable and life-saving information between organizations and the communities where they work.

• *Greater Trust and Access* – Robust channels for two-way communication with communities can provide reliable information that can protect the safety and security of staff, volunteers, and community members. Information from the community helps to create a better understanding of the practical realities and evolving dynamics within and among communities. Enhanced knowledge and contextual understanding can offer institutions the opportunity to respond with greater efficacy to emerging security concerns.

• *Volunteers Provide a Gateway to the Community* – Helping volunteers to see their role as fundamental to strong community engagement leads to better quality programming and enhanced trust and access to communities. The Movement's strong volunteer network is a unique asset for National Societies and is an added value because volunteers are often the bridge to safely accessing the community, building trust with local people, and ensuring that people feel that they have a voice in the programmes and operations. For example, in Sudan, many volunteers have been engaged in accountability-related process since the early pilots. In this context, the branch's engagement with the community is highly dependent on the strength of its volunteers and their understanding of the local communities needs and challenges. In almost all field visits for this research, volunteers were the messengers of information to community members, and inherently the Red Cross' gateway to the community. Investing time in volunteers can have a profound effect on ensuring that quality information is shared with communities.

• *Strong Feedback Practices* – Establishing robust systems, like the one described in the DRC Ebola operation, where feedback from the community can be gathered, analyzed, responded to, and used can increase the Movement's ability to adapt more quickly to evolving contexts. Robust feedback systems enable organizations to ensure that they are providing communities with information that is relevant, and in many cases life-saving.


Trust Can Increase Safety for Staff and Volunteers

The Kenya Red Cross implemented a strong community engagement strategy which strengthened communication channels between the Red Cross and the community. Increased dialogue and information sharing directly increased trust between frontline staff and the local community. These communication channels became essential when Red Cross staff were building a fence to enclose a meeting area. Through these communication channels, communities alerted staff to security concerns in the area, and suggested that the staff build two exits to the fenced-in area so that if a conflict arose (which is common in the area), staff would have a quick and safe exit.[29]

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29. Cechvala, Sarah. 2017. Mainstreaming of Accountability to Communities: An Operational Case Study. Nairobi: Kenya Red Cross Society. CDA Collaborative Learning and International Federation of the Red Cross.

CONCLUSION

This research offers extensive evidence to suggest that greater accountability to those we serve improves our work, and can ultimately save lives. Extensive evidence gathered through this process enabled researchers to substantiate many of the key assumptions developed as part of the desk review, and develop a theory of change about the value and impact of greater accountability to communities for the Movement:
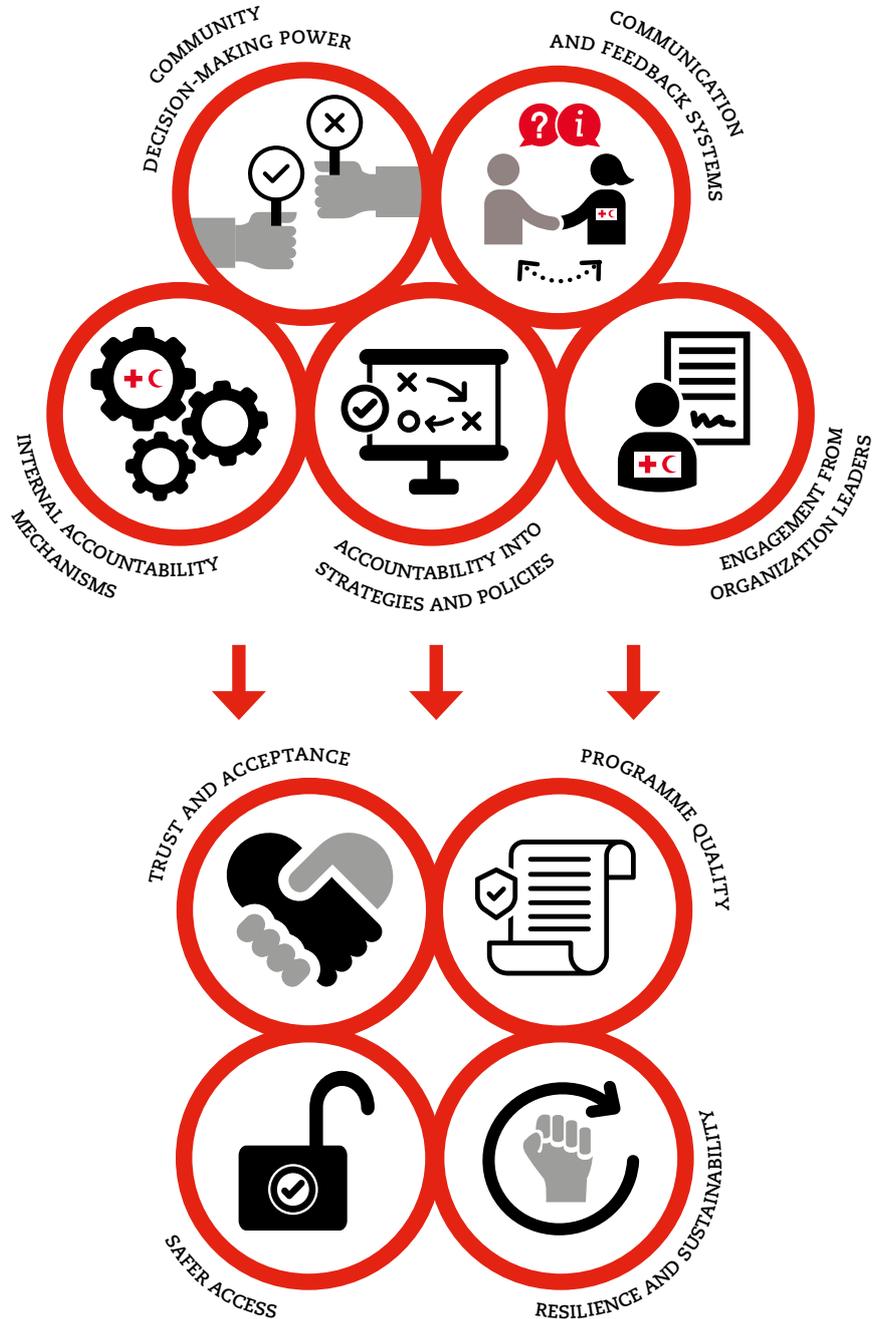
Written by Sarah Cechvala, Managing Director, CDA Collaborative

For more information, please contact : Alexandra Sicotte-Levesque, Manager, Community Engagement, IFRC, alexandra.sicotte-levesque@ifrc.org

Increased attention to and systematic integration of accountability and community-led approaches across all programmes and operations can truly shift the way the Movement works. A shift that creates the opportunity for communities to take the lead in the decisions that directly affect their lives. Closing the gap in knowledge and evidence is a key step in this process. Increased evidence can ensure buy-in from colleagues across the Movement and strengthen momentum to make this important shift in practice. While change is not easy, it inherently requires everyone to consider: *how can I be more engaged with, and more accountable to, the communities I am trying to help?*