

protection
dignité efficacité
participation
proximité transparence standard apprentissage
communication éthique **redevabilité**
feedback Engagements dialogue



Bossangoa
Accountability to Affected Populations
Mission Report
22-29 April 2014

1. Objective of the mission and context

The objective of the mission was to raise awareness of humanitarian actors on accountability to affected populations, as well as to support hubs with the implementation of accountability mechanisms. The visit took place only a few days after the departure of the remaining Muslim population from Bossangoa, which radically changed the dynamics in the city. Attacks by armed groups in the vicinity of Bossangoa made it impossible to plan field visits. The main meetings that took place during the mission were the following:

- Inter cluster: Awareness raising workshop on accountability to affected populations and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
- Four participative evaluations with a total of 58 community members
- Meeting with the local radio “voix de l’Ouham” (voice of Ouham)
- Meeting with the mayor of Bossangoa and the “sous-préfet” of Bouca
- Meeting with FAO and CRS on practical ways to integrate accountability in the agriculture campaign 2014
- Debriefing on the mission report with the Protection Cluster and the Inter cluster

2. Methodology¹

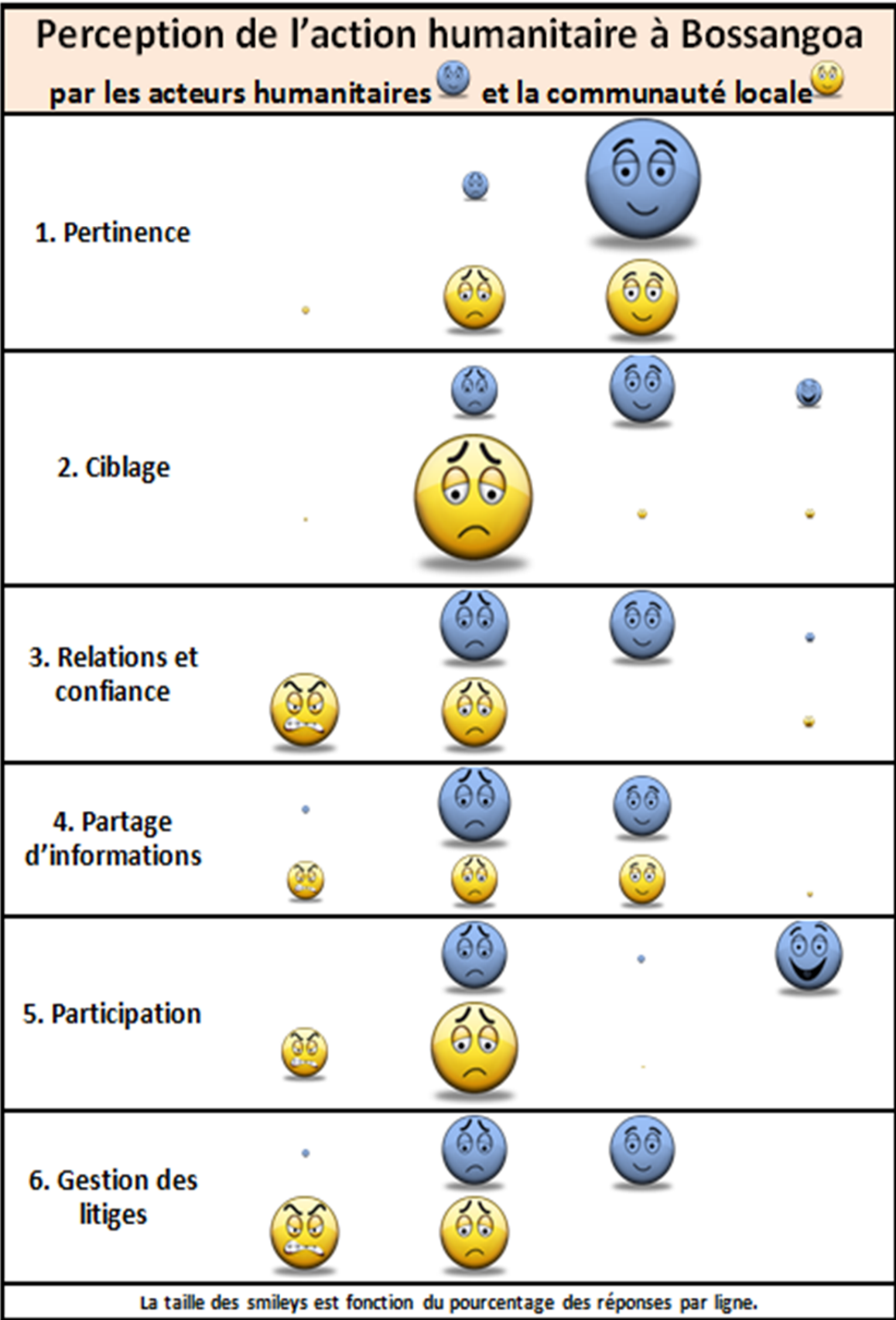
A workshop was organised with the members of the Inter cluster to raise awareness on accountability. During the workshop, the members of the ICC conducted a self-assessment on the six questions that served as a basis for discussions with communities. The aim was to have a basis on which to compare the perception of humanitarian actors with that of communities on questions of (1) relevance, (2) targeting of programmes, (3) relations with communities, (4) information sharing and transparency, (5) participation, (6) feedback and complaints handling. Subsequently, four discussions took place with community representatives. Two groups (one with men, one with women) were facilitated by Coopi in their listening centre. Furthermore, a discussion took place with a group of men and women in the Sembé neighbourhood (1st district) and another one in Boy Cotton neighbourhood (3rd district). We also attended a distribution by WFP/CRS during which discussions with beneficiaries were organised. The results of the discussions with the humanitarians and the community representatives are graphically illustrated on the following page.

We acknowledge that the number of people we talked to was limited, but also note that the idea of this exercise was not to conduct a formal evaluation. The responses given represent the realities of the people we talked to, based on a sample which was as representative as possible. It is also worth noting that the discussions were limited to the programmes being implemented in Bossangoa because of the impossibility to organise field trips. Nonetheless, even if we talk about perceptions here, the elements that emerge should be considered as serious indicators for further investigation or corrective actions.

In terms of programmes reviewed, the discussions focused predominantly on food distributions (WFP/Caritas), NFIs (UNHCR/UNICEF) and medical care (MSF), but programmes by ACF, ACTED, the Red Cross or Coopi were also mentioned. It can already be noted that there were no significant differences in the responses given by the men and women in the different groups.

¹ The methodology for participative evaluations is based on a pilot which is available here: <https://car.humanitarianresponse.info/en/themes/accountability-affected-populations> and <http://www.hapinternational.org/what-we-do/responding-to-emergencies/outils-et-messages-cles-pour-la-rca.aspx>.

3. Summary of the self-assessments in Bossangoa²







² Rating by humanitarians in blue (1st line) and in yellow (2nd line) for local communities

4. Detailed analysis of the discussions with communities

4.1 RELEVANCE OF PROGRAMMES

Do the humanitarian organisations respond to the most urgent needs of your community?

| | There’s no humanitarian response in our community.  | The humanitarian response that takes place is insufficient and does not respond to our priorities.  | The humanitarian response responds to our priorities but is insufficient in quantity.  | The humanitarian response is sufficient and responds to our priorities.  |
|----------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Humanitarians | 0.0% | 35.3% | 47.1% | 17.6% |
| Community | 4.3% | 43.5% | 52.2% | 0.0% |

Analysis

Both humanitarians and community representatives agreed that the humanitarian response was insufficient compared to the needs that the population was facing.

Findings and comments

In general, and especially for IDPs, the humanitarian response delivered the most important items, namely food and non-food items, even if it was in quantities seen as insufficient, and not regular enough. The communities were thankful to the United Nations and NGOs for the assistance given, acknowledging that the current situation resulted from actions committed by Central Africans themselves. However, numerous people made a case for fairer distributions and asked for humanitarian actors to better monitor their programmes to ensure quality, maintain a dialogue with communities and prevent corruption.

“We also need cooking tools.”

At the beginning of the response, a complete kit of non-food items was distributed, but its content was reduced afterwards, creating a feeling of unfairness, but also creating suspicions of possible embezzlement of goods including mats or food.

“All households receive the same thing, irrespective of their size. That’s not fair.”

The fact that all households received the same amount of goods, irrespective of their size, was raised as an injustice and perceived as unfair.

“Irrespective of our disease, we always receive the same treatment.”





Regarding access to health care, communities explained that all patients received Panadol and Quartem, irrespective of the symptoms they had.

“This programme supports people’s dignity and will to live”

Several people (mainly women) emphasised the importance of the psycho-social assistance from Coopi for people who underwent traumatic experiences that had led to a loss of appetite or will to live.

4.2. TARGETING OF BENEFICIARIES

How do you judge the capacity of the implementing organisations to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in your community?

| | The most vulnerable are not consulted and do not have access to the assistance provided.  | The most vulnerable are not consulted but have access to the assistance in the same way as other members of the community.  | The most vulnerable are consulted but do not receive any special treatment.  | The most vulnerable are consulted and their special needs are taken into account in the assistance provided.  |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Humanitarians | 0.0% | 35.3% | 47.1% | 17.6% |
| Community | 2.2% | 87.0% | 6.5% | 4.3% |

Analysis

A large share of humanitarians was confident that the most vulnerable in the community were consulted on their needs, even if they didn’t receive any special treatment. The communities, however, stated that the most vulnerable were not consulted and did not receive any special treatment – if they had access to the assistance at all.

Findings

When asked who the most vulnerable in their community were, community members mentioned widows, orphans, elderly people, and the disabled, underlining these groups were less likely to support themselves independently. The communities regretted that the most vulnerable did not more attention, be it in relation to the content of what was distributed or the way they received access to these goods and services.

The communities also regretted a lack of clarity on the selection criteria and registration as well as the consistency in applying selection criteria, particularly when the humanitarian situation changed.

“Returnees from Bangui are also in a precarious state but they refused to include them in the distribution lists.”





“The people who took refuge in the bush were not taken into account when they returned and joined the IDP site at the church.”

“My husband passed away after he was registered as the head of the family. They refused to change the name in the list of beneficiaries to my benefit. Consequently, myself and my children have not had the right to access distributions.”

“The most vulnerable are the first ones to be discriminated and to lose access.”

4.3. TRUSTFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS

How would you qualify the quality of the relationship with the organisations that work in your community?

| | <u>We have a trust problem with this organisation.</u> Promises are not kept. Communication is bad.  | <u>We only believe what we see.</u> Activities eventually take place, but in an unpredictable way.  | <u>The relations are good.</u> There’s regular and respectful communication, and promises are kept.  | <u>We fully trust this organisation.</u> We feel listened to and respected. All decisions that have been taken are explained to us.  |
|----------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Humanitarians | 6.3% | 50.0% | 43.8% | 0.0% |
| Community | 50.0% | 47.8% | 0.0% | 2.2% |

Analysis

Regarding relations between humanitarians and communities, the humanitarians were more optimistic than the community representatives. The opinions of the communities oscillated between resignation and waiting for promises to be put into action (“We only believe what we see”), and outrage because promises were not kept and there was a lack of information sharing.

Findings

Community members were angered by the distribution deadlines or frequency not being respected, combined with a lack of information on the reasons why distributions were delayed or cancelled. They found this discouraging, and problematic for planning their own food security. They said that if it was explained to them, they could understand, but failing transparent information, they thought that silence was a sign of dishonest practices.

“What undermines trust is when promises are not kept. For example, we were told that distributions would be adapted to the size of households. But at the first distribution we received 50kg of rice, and at the second distribution only a bowl.”

“We were told that the ration was for one month. We have planned our consumption accordingly, but we had to wait more than two months to receive another distribution.”




“The next distribution has been announced since March but it has only started yesterday (end of April), and not everybody as had access to it so far.”

“We don’t understand why it takes such a long time. We see that the food is in the warehouse, but it’s not being distributed.”

The lack of information and the promises that are not kept have a negative effect on the trust between humanitarians and communities. Tensions, sometimes violent, can result from this, and most often have to be managed by the district leaders. For example, when youth from the 3rd district intended to destroy the WFP warehouse because they felt ignored by the distributions, the district leaders were the ones who calmed them to prevent the violence.

4.4. INFORMATION SHARING AND TRANSPARENCY

What level of information have you received about the organisations and its activities in your community?

| | I have no information about the aid organisations working here and their activities.  | I’ve received some information about the aid organisations and their activities.  | I’ve received all necessary information about the programmes from the aid organisations.  | I’ve received all necessary information about the organisations, their programmes and the budget of their activities.  |
|----------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Humanitarians | 5.9% | 52.9% | 41.2% | 0.0% |
| Community | 25.4% | 35.6% | 35.6% | 3.4% |

Analysis

Regarding information sharing and transparency, a third of respondents were relatively happy with the information they received, while the majority stated that they didn’t have access to any information, or more by coincidence than as a result of a well planned communications strategy. Humanitarians seemed conscious of existing gaps since half of them conceded that current information sharing practices were insufficient.

Findings

The majority of community members had access one way or another to information on programmes in general, and distributions in particular. However, the majority received this information from

neighbours rather than through direct communication from humanitarians, or local authorities, who felt left out at this level. Community members said they felt more comfortable if they had access to several sources for the same information, and they wished that district leaders were used more for information sharing because that was the source they trusted most. The importance of having access to information was clear to everybody.





“Because of a lack of information, we don’t have access to food and other services. Those who have the information are served, but those who don’t have it are not served.”

Another comment concerned information on actions that the humanitarians had decided would not be implemented. For example, beneficiaries expected a distribution of seeds in Bossangoa. Knowing that a distribution would not take place would allow them to realise that they had to explore other options more actively.

“The distribution of seeds and tools only happens in villages – why not in Bossangoa? We don’t know if they will distribute something here as well.”

4.5. PARTICIPATION

What degree of participation have you experienced with humanitarian programmes in your community?

| | <u>Ignored.</u> The activities are planned and implemented without us being informed or consulted.  | <u>Informed, but not involved.</u> They tell us what has been decided and how the project will affect us.  | <u>Consulted.</u> The organisation asks our opinion about the planning and implementation of projects and informs us of the decisions that have been taken.  | <u>Involved:</u> Our voice counts in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects.  |
|----------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Humanitarians | 0.0% | 47.1% | 5.9% | 47.1% |
| Community | 33.9% | 64.4% | 1.7% | 0.0% |

Analysis

A large proportion of humanitarians were confident that the communities were heavily involved in all phases of the project cycle. The community representatives, however, had a different opinion: a large majority felt informed about actions taken, but said they was neither consulted nor really participating.

Findings

To illustrate the situation, it was the first time for the four groups we talked to that anyone had engaged with them to ask their opinion, a sign that there might be a lack of participation as well as a lack of monitoring and evaluation. There was also a feeling among authorities that there was a disparity between the number of needs assessments and visits by high representatives from headquarters on the one hand, and the level of concrete programs that were implemented on the other hand.





“There are too many discussions and visitors who come to talk. What we want is action, not talk. The needs are obvious. Action is needed in terms of assistance and protection.”

Local authorities also took the view that they were not sufficiently involved in the planning and implementation of programmes, e.g. distributions. To them, this created serious problem:

- The quality of registration lists was weak
- Tensions with communities were more likely to erupt and result in security problems
- The risk of corruption was higher

4.6. FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING

How do you raise problems with the organisations that work in your community?

| | We do not have any possibility to communicate our complaints.  | We can complain, but we never receive a detailed response.  | Organisations have explained to us how to raise complaints or problems, and complainants receive a response most of the time.  | There's a system for complaints handling. Those who file a complaint get a response quickly, and actions are taken to resolve the issue.  |
|----------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Humanitarians | 5.9% | 47.1% | 47.1% | 0.0% |
| Community | 50.8% | 49.2% | 0.0% | 0.0% |

Analysis

Regarding the management of feedback and complaints, the communities were clearly more critical than the humanitarians, noting a lack of complaints handling mechanisms and capacity to follow up and respond to comments and problems raised by communities.

Findings

Generally, community members didn't know what possibilities they had to raise a problem, although they did raise concerns when they encountered representatives from organisations. At the same time, it seemed that NGOs and United Nations agencies did not have systems in place to identify,

record, and handle complaints. Consequently, the responses given to issues that were raised usually only consisted of promising a response “the next time” without really following up. The result was a lack of trust and a resignation on the part of the community members. At the same time, the group of women we talked to indicated that if they faced abuse of power or sexual abuse, they would feel comfortable to report this to the person responsible at Coopi.

“Why lose time with complaining if there will be no response anyway?”

“Maybe if we knew the system for submitting complaints, we would use it.”

“In our neighbourhood, WFP registered 450 households but in the end only distributed to 100 people, the first 100 who came.”

“Certain people who were registered early on have still not received anything and have not received any information since. There were up to five food distributions in certain areas, while we only had three.”

“They don’t respond to us and there’s no monitoring and evaluation of distributions. As committee/district leaders we do the monitoring, but they don’t listen to us.”

5. Suggested actions and follow up

WHAT THE COMMUNITIES DESIRE, AND THE WAY THEY WOULD PUT THIS INTO ACTION

1. Less talk, more action

- *We would like to see more effectiveness and implementation directly by United Nations agencies, instead of going through a chain of intermediaries. It’s slower, and money disappears on the way.*
- *We want more concrete action by agencies that are specialised in protection issues.*
- *We need tools and seed quickly or we will miss the planting season.*

2. Better targeting of programmes

- *Special treatment needs to be reserved for the most vulnerable. For example, provide a big tent to elderly people to protect them from the rain, facilitate access to sanitary installations or special support for food.*
- *Orphans need to be taken care of.*
- *Rations need to be adapted to household size.*
- *The humanitarian response needs to be harmonised and people need to be treated equitably, also between different IDP sites.*
- *During distributions, special priority queues could be created for disabled or elderly people.*
- *Targeting only works if selection criteria are agreed upon together and if they’re transparent and explained clearly to everyone (the elderly, HIV, etc.).*

3. Be more transparent and keep your promises

- *Inform us about your organisation, who you are, the responsibilities of each one of you in the programmes, what is planned, the delays and the reasons for them (e.g. local dashboard, summary of interventions with authorities).*
- *Use local radio, churches and community leaders to share information in Sango.*
- *The radio is a useful means of communication but not everybody has access to it. It would be better if area leaders were also informed and could pass on information.*

- *Clarify who is responsible for food distributions (WFP or Caritas?).*
- *Keep your promises, or tell us the truth if there are any problems and you can't keep your promises.*
- *Don't record complaints and don't ask us to submit complaints if you can't follow up with concrete action.*

4. Prevent corruption and improve effectiveness

- *Monitor your programmes to verify that projects are implemented properly, identify problems and prevent corruption and embezzlement.*
- *It would be good if each organisation organised a monitoring meeting with committee leaders at least once a month to follow up on needs and share information.*
- *UNHCR and WFP need to be more directly involved in monitoring and evaluation.*
- *Involve community leaders to identify and manage complaints.*
- *Explain to us how we can raise problems or complaints, and what the scope of the feedback and complaints handling system is.*

5. Take advantage of our capacities

- *We want to participate more in programmes.*
- *We want to see our complaints and comments listened to and followed up on professionally.*
- *Agencies need to conduct the distributions themselves or at least conduct the monitoring and evaluation of distributions to ensure that the work has been done properly, and ask our opinion.*
- *Use community members to unload trucks. Rotate the people used as day-workers so that more people can profit from such an opportunity.*
- *If we participated in distributions, we would help prevent fraud, and transparency would be increased. Also, this would prevent anger and tensions.*
- *There are capable people in the neighbourhoods who could contribute to an action plan for the their area.*

SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP IN BOSSANGOA

A number of follow-up actions are suggested to humanitarian actors to acknowledge the discussions that have taken place:

1. Discussion within an enlarged ICC, or a meeting to share the results of the discussions with communities.
2. Analysis of the measures suggested by the communities and those that can be added by humanitarian actors, and selection of measures that are relevant and feasible.
3. Information to communities (particularly the discussion groups, but also the communities and authorities in general) about the measures the humanitarian actors are planning to implement on the basis of the participative evaluations.
4. Use and adoption of the participative methodology in the monitoring and evaluation of programmes in Bossangoa and the prefecture.