Workshop on Accountability to Communities

REPORT

17 – 19 September 2013

International Environment House, Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland

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Background

World Vision's programme on accountability is built around four main areas - sharing information, consulting with communities, promoting participation, and collecting and acting on feedback and complaints. We understand the main benefits of being accountable are the trust built between WV and the community and improvements to our efficiency and effectiveness.

The current WV Programme Accountability Framework (PAF), which describes our minimum standards in these four areas of accountability, was developed during a meeting in Geneva in 2009. A second WV face-to-face accountability meeting took place in Kuala Lumpur in 2011, following which the WV Accountability to Children and Communities Strategic Intent was developed. We would now like to take the opportunity of having this September 2013 workshop to review what WV and our peer agencies have learned from our experiences to date.

The workshop took place over three days, 17 – 19 September, followed by a half-day on 20 Sept for WV staff only. A separate Workshop on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse took place on the afternoon of Friday 20 September.

WORLD VISION'S PROGRAMME ACCOUNTABILITY COMPONENTS

Providing Information

Ensuring that relevant programme information is made available and intentionally provided to communities in a timely, accessible and accurate manner.

Consulting with communities

Applying the principle of informed consent and ensuring that communities are aware of, understand and agree with key decisions relating to our intervention.

Promoting participation

Purposely empowering communities and building their capacity to participate in the entire programme cycle.

Collecting and acting on feedback and complaints

Implementing community feedback and complaints procedures that are accessible, safe and effective.

Accountability in Urban Environments

On the morning of the first day of the World Vision International workshop on Accountability to Communities, taking place from 17 to 20 September 2013, the main focus was on accountability in urban contexts. Presentations were given by Leah Campbell (Programme and Research Assistant, ALNAP), Alice Obrecht (Senior Research Analyst, Humanitarian Futures Programme, King's College London), and Emily Rogers (Accountability to Beneficiaries Advisor, British Red Cross) at the beginning of the session, and a number of key issues were then picked up in discussions.

Why We Focus on Urban Humanitarian Action

World Vision International and many other organisations in the humanitarian sector are keen to continually improve policies and implementation in the area of accountability to people affected by crises. Therefore, a session on urban humanitarian action was arranged to identify the main differences between rural and urban responses such as in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The key question for this session on urban humanitarian action can be summarised as follows: How do humanitarian organisations responding in an urban environment ensure accountability to crisis-affected populations, so that they are properly informed, can make informed decisions, are regularly consulted, participate in key decision-making through the whole project cycle, and feel listened to and respected?

The key goal is to ensure that project participants and the host community can hold us to account for our actions. The conclusions from this workshop session should make clear to what extent accountability frameworks and other key policy documents, staff recruitment and development, and guidance and tools have to be adapted to face future challenges in urban responses.

Presentations

David Loquercio, Head of Policy and External Relations at the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership and facilitator of the session, underlined that urban issues are becoming increasingly prominent in the humanitarian sector – simply because more people are living in urban environments every day and because cities are generally prone to disasters. Moreover, he pointed out that although most accountability mechanisms are designed for rural contexts, it is worth asking whether a distinction between rural and urban contexts is even warranted.

Leah Campbell on humanitarian responses in urban areas

Leah Campbell, Programme and Research Assistant at ALNAP, introduced four key themes that enable humanitarian professionals to analyse the differences between rural and urban settings. The four key themes or analytical dimensions she presented are diversity, density, dynamics, and deprivation:

- Diversity: who counts?
- There's a large diversity of different actors
- There's a large variety of needs which are right next to each other
- A wide range of different technologies and skills is available
- It's harder to identify the most vulnerable people in a city
- There are numerous formal and especially informal networks and ways people organise themselves
- Density: who is accountable to whom?
- In a given area, the scale is bigger in many ways which means that needs are usually bigger as well – this leads to a strain on resources, and coordination becomes more important
- There's a concentration of governance institutions

- The impact of disasters or conflict on urban infrastructure can be severe

o Dynamics: how to adapt?

- Urban populations are more fluid and mobile regarding their work situation and in reference to rural-urban family connections and movements
- In an urban context, information channels are many – this is primarily an opportunity because it is easier to reach people, but it also means misinformation and rumours can spread easily

o Deprivation: accountable for what?

- There's a lack of baseline information from local governments
- Chronic vulnerabilities, slum poverty
- It's very difficult to measure success

In many ways, the challenges of urban disasters (such as coordination) are nothing new. However, humanitarian professionals must realise that cities concentrate and compound these challenges. In addition, there are unique challenges specific to the urban context (such as the nature of community) which cannot be ignored.

Alice Obrecht on reflections from the Humanitarian Futures Project

Alice Obrecht, Senior Research Analyst at the Humanitarian Futures Programme, discussed if a distinct urban category even exists. She suggested that diversity, density, and dynamics increase as you move from rural to urban environments but that geographical areas are certainly not discrete between urban and non-urban areas.

Moreover, Alice pointed out that the best ideas for key infrastructure projects come from the communities themselves and that participatory planning is a big opportunity for NGOs to add value, especially where their data collection is more comprehensive and accurate than that of the local government. Finally, she argued that it's a myth that urban social structures are weaker than in rural areas. Often, they are actually quite strong but just harder for outsiders to recognise.

Emily Rogers on urban humanitarian action

Emily Rogers, British Red Cross, explained that it is rather difficult to define communities in an urban context. People often don't know their neighbours well, which means that it is harder to identify the most vulnerable.

Furthermore, she pointed out that a trend towards older cities with more female-headed communities can be observed. Also, the fact that an organisation's offices are close to project areas provides a great opportunity for creating trust and familiarity. Finally, Emily mentioned that access to a large number of urban communication channels and sources equally presents an opportunity for an improved response, but that information from these sources might not always be reliable.

Summary by David Loquercio

All in all, it's important to not just see the challenges and obstacles, but to also the opportunities. In urban contexts, people are generally more demanding and have greater expectations, but certain aspects of a humanitarian response do not change in an urban context, and it might be a good starting point to build on these. As in other environments, it's key to communicate with crisis-affected people and to make sure that their preferences, coping strategies, and institutional structures take precedence over alien parallel systems brought in by humanitarian organisations. Moreover, urban contexts provide an opportunity to collaborate closely with local academic institutions, and to coordinate intensely with a wide range of key stakeholders including other humanitarian organisations, government authorities, the private sector, etc. Organisations just have to figure out through which channels they want to communicate and interact with project participants and other stakeholders. Lastly, urban responses require specific skill sets, such as experts on infrastructure, local law, etc.

Discussion

In a second part of the session, participants were asked to split into groups and to identify key challenges and opportunities in urban humanitarian responses. Presentations were then made in plenary. The following questions were discussed: What does it mean to work in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual, and socio-economically unequal urban context? How else do cities differ from rural areas (higher population density in cities, the dynamics of a highly mobile urban society, and the realities of deprivation in urban vs. rural contexts)?

The results of the discussions are presented under the four key themes of diversity, density, dynamics, and deprivation. Under each key theme, the main challenges and opportunities are highlighted for the following four areas: staff competencies, information sharing, participation, and complaints handling.

Diversity

This section discusses challenges and opportunities regarding the diversity of actors and related issues in urban environments.

STAFF COMPETENCIES

Challenges:

Highly diverse mix of cultures – A major challenge for humanitarian workers in urban contexts is the highly diverse mix of cultures. Compared to rural areas, a wider range of soft skills, e.g. more developed facilitation skills, are needed to be able to handle such a complex environment. Consequently, staff need to be trained on soft skills.

Context-analyses – Another difference to responses in rural areas is that context-analyses need to be deeper and more regular than in rural environments because of urban complexity and changing dynamics.

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) – Sexual exploitation and abuse, SEA, by aid workers is likely to be more widespread since there is less social cohesion.

Transparency & local collaboration – To make urban responses work, it's crucial to be as transparent as possible and to show a willingness to work with local partners and other local stakeholders.

Information sharing – It is difficult to gain accurate information in urban settings because the 'information market' is already very crowded.

Opportunities:

Qualified local staff – One of the opportunities regarding staff competencies is that qualified local staff can be found in relatively large numbers.

Opportunity to learn – The challenges discussed above present a great opportunity to gain new soft skills in facilitation, negotiations, advocacy, partnership brokering, etc.

INFORMATION SHARING

Challenges:

Highly diverse mix of cultures – Migrants, internally displaced people, and refugees from other countries arrive in urban areas looking for safety and opportunities. This means that a diverse mix of different cultures, languages, and religions, but also social status, income, and political views, etc. ensues. One major consequence is that communities are likely to be not as clear and as strong as in rural areas where a small number of extended families live in one area or village. Information sharing networks are often weaker. All in all, information sharing activities therefore become more complex and costly in urban responses.

Terminology – Usually, there's a common language that all understand, which mitigates the above problem. Connected to this is a potential challenge which regards finding the right terminology, so that everybody understands the same thing. Some words have different meanings in different cultures.

Managing expectations – As always, it's a major challenge to manage the expectations of all the various groups and stakeholders, and this is certainly even more so in urban contexts.

Opportunities:
Access to information and communications technology – A major opportunity in urban responses comes from widespread access to information and communications technology, which can make it much easier to reach different groups in their preferred language.

PARTICIPATION

Challenges:
Communities and community representatives – Since communities are less likely to be clearly or strongly defined, it's more difficult to make out different communities and choose legitimate community representatives to participate in decision-making processes. However, project participants and other stakeholders need to be included in key decision-making as it is clearly impossible to understand local urban diversity and dynamics without local input.

Identifying the most vulnerable – Because there's more complexity and less social cohesion, it's more difficult to identify the most vulnerable.

Involving all groups – It's challenging to ensure that all the different groups can participate in a project. It's crucial, therefore, to be transparent and to explain exactly why certain groups were included and not others.

Refusal to participate – Certain groups might not want to participate in any way because they live in illegal informal settlements and prefer not to be registered officially anywhere since they risk eviction or harassment. A key focus must be put on establishing trust with these groups and explaining the role of one's organisation and its projects.

Complex power dynamics – Finally, the complex power dynamics that exist in urban contexts need to be analysed and understood to ensure that participation is genuine and free.

Opportunities:
Skilled people – People with more and better knowledge and skills can be found in urban areas, which means that individuals participating in key decision-making are likely to be more sophisticated than in rural areas.

Informal networks – Cities provide opportunities to work with and learn from informal networks. Such networks can be easily identified through consultations with the host community.

Groups to include – Host communities should be consulted to find out what groups, neighbourhoods, etc. should be included in participatory decision-making processes. Even though communities might not always be clear, it's possible to consult local people through local churches, schools, community support groups such as women's groups and savings groups, and many other institutions and formal and informal networks.

Building on existing structures – It's key to build on existing institutions, organisations, systems and resources, and to not try to reinvent the wheel or create alien parallel structures.

Local sources of innovation – Project participants and host communities in general can be a source of innovation. Accountability mechanisms, particularly participation, can be used as a way to leverage these ideas and customise programmes. Similarly, local community-based organisations should be used as a source of innovation and as a connection to local communities and groups. Local partners and other stakeholders can also be involved in the mobilisation of resources.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING

Challenges:
Establishing trust – It is essential to establish trust before people start using complaints mechanisms.

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) – SEA by aid workers is probably more prevalent. Consequently, these issues have to be analysed, understood and prevented in urban contexts.

Density

This section discusses challenges and opportunities regarding population density and related issues in urban environments.

STAFF COMPETENCIES

Challenges:

More staff – Because of the higher population density in urban areas, more staff is needed.

Cities concentrate risks – Staff have to be aware of and prepared for the fact that cities concentrate certain risks, e.g. epidemics, destruction of complex infrastructure, etc.

Disaffected youth – Disaffected city youth can present a problem for staff security.

INFORMATION SHARING

Challenges:

Crowded information landscape – In cities, numerous stakeholders share information for different purposes. In this crowded information landscape, it is a challenge for humanitarian organisations to get the right information to the right people.
Coordination – Coordination with all key stakeholders is much more complex and challenging.
Rumours: Rumours spread quickly, and responding organisations have to be prepared for that.

Opportunities:

Information usually spreads quickly through informal networks, which is good as long as the organisation controls what information is being spread.

PARTICIPATION

Opportunities:

Proximity to project areas – In urban areas, an organisation's offices are closer to the community, which facilitates interaction with and participation of crisis-affected people. Building trust should therefore be easier than in rural environments.

Linking humanitarian and development work – Humanitarian action and development initiatives can be more easily linked in cities.

Crowdsourcing – Cities are ideal for crowdsourcing since mobile phone use is usually widespread.
Local partnerships – Cities are also convenient for building partnerships with local academic institutions, the private sector, and many other local stakeholders.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING

Challenges:

Greater volume – A much greater volume of complaints can be expected because of the higher population density and the more tech-savvy and demanding nature of urban populations. Consequently, complaint referral systems between different organisations need to be robust.

Knowing who to complain to – In most cases, a large number of organisations works in a relatively small area, making it harder for project participants and others to identify whom to complain to about a certain incident. This is certainly a big challenge, but it's also a great opportunity for establishing joint complaint systems.

Building on existing structures – If possible, complaints and response mechanisms should be built on existing systems; organisations just have to make sure these are confidential.

Opportunities:

Because of the pervasiveness of information and communications technology, most complaints can be received and answered via these technologies (naturally, this excludes sensitive complaints such as of sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers).

Dynamics

This section discusses challenges and opportunities regarding the high mobility of actors and related issues in urban environments.

STAFF COMPETENCIES

Challenges: Population dynamics are much more complex than in rural contexts because urban people are highly mobile. Clearly, this necessitates continued engagement and frequent context analyses.

INFORMATION SHARING

Challenges: Keeping people informed – Since people are highly mobile, it is difficult to ensure that project participants and the host community are well informed. Information is quickly out of date due to urban dynamics.

PARTICIPATION

Challenges: Mobility – Participation can be complicated through frequent changes in the composition of local populations.
Working hours – The fact that people's working hours have to be respected can be an obstacle to organising consultations.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING

Challenges: Mobility – It can be hard to respond to a complaint if complainants, witnesses, etc. are highly mobile.

Deprivation

This section discusses challenges and opportunities regarding the deprivation of actors, specifically in slums, and related issues in urban environments.

STAFF COMPETENCIES

Challenges:
Staff security – Slum dwellers are often among the poorest people in a given country, even when compared to poor rural populations.

INFORMATION SHARING

Challenges:
Getting information to isolated groups – Since most large cities in developing countries usually grow in uncontrolled ways, it might be difficult to get accurate information to isolated groups.
Access for the most vulnerable – It's probably difficult for the most vulnerable to access information and communications technologies.

PARTICIPATION

Challenges:
Opportunity costs & incentives – The opportunity costs for project participants and others are higher in urban environments since there's a much stronger reliance on cash. People usually do not grow their own food in cities as is common in rural areas. Therefore, the time that is being spent in consultations cannot be used for making money, and at the same time people cannot fall back on their own food production if necessary. The key question is, What incentives do people have to participate?

Refusal to participate – Certain groups or people might not want to participate because they live in illegal informal settlements and prefer not to be registered officially anywhere.

Access – Some neighbourhoods might be difficult to reach because infrastructure is bad or practically non-existent.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING

Challenges:
Refusal to participate – Groups or people living in illegal informal settlements might not want to file complaints because they prefer not to get too much attention.

Conclusions

Is it true that diversity, density, dynamics, and deprivation differ systematically in rural versus urban environments? Some key differences could definitely be made out. All in all, urban environments pose numerous challenges. However, major opportunities such as the proximity of an organisation's offices to project areas, the diversity of potential partners, and the availability of widely used information and communications technology also became clear.

The discussions during the workshop have shown that there are many crucial issues to be addressed when responding in an urban context. On a number of issues, there was no broad consent. For example, many workshop participants argued that social structures are weaker than in rural contexts, while others pointed to the fact that social structures are not weaker but just different. Open questions certainly remain. For example: Are mega-dense cities in the same category as large cities? Such questions will have to be answered in future endeavours.

Some of the key conclusions from the discussions were that solutions should build on local infrastructure, institutions, and businesses – alien parallel structures should be avoided. However, regarding local information and communications technology such as mobile phones, internet, and radio, it is important to note that access might be unequal depending on gender and age. Also, urban people depend much more on cash, which means that participatory processes might be even trickier to organise than in rural areas because of fixed working hours. In any case, market-based approaches are seen as key to any success stories.

To make participation work in urban environments – like everywhere else, in fact – it is necessary to realise that participation itself must be used to determine what kind and what level of participation is the most appropriate. The first step must be to consult with the host community on how to design participatory processes, and on how to make sure that people are motivated and have the right incentives to participate.

Generally, because of the various challenges posed in urban environments, it's important to think outside one's sector – to 'break the silo'. As first steps, existing staff skills should be mapped and staff challenges and shortcomings should be recognised. On top of that, staff with specific technical skills need be recruited to ensure an organisation is capable of handling the much more complex infrastructure in urban environments. It's certainly positive that many people with these kinds of skills can be found locally in the cities that humanitarian organisations work in.

Another issue that came up in the discussion was how to deal with local government authorities. On the one hand, it was seen as an opportunity to engage with the authorities on different levels. On the other hand, it is a challenge to decide on how they should be included in decision-making processes. The latter will probably be decided by their actual power and effectiveness. Finally, what are organisations to do if engaging with a local government contradicts basic humanitarian principles, especially in conflict situations?

Workshop participants kept repeating that organisations have less control over their work and its impact in urban environments. This is certainly a key issue to be kept in mind when designing complaints and response mechanisms. A clear line has to be drawn and communicated to project participants and others over what exactly can be complained about and what is outside the organisation's control.

Accountability in urban contexts will be explored further through 2014. Further information will be sent out when available.

Technology for Accountability

Background

The application of technology within humanitarian and development agencies' programming is becoming more widespread – with GIS, data recording, and mobile phone applications now being widely used.

This session gives an overview of some of the technologies being employed in our programmes and discusses the benefits and potential challenges of using this technology: what do we need to anticipate and be prepared for (privacy, cost, access to information) and where should we focus our resources?

Technology

Gabriel Almon, a member of the WVI Fellowship Programme, gave an introduction to Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which enable the visualisation and analysis of information collected in the field with geographic coordinates attached. Increased use of GIS by NGOs is leading to more customised applications becoming available, and more skilled experts specialising in NGO GIS applications.

A second presentation by Otto Farkas (WVI Senior Advisor, Global Office of Strategy, Collaboration & Innovation) described the development and use of Last Mile Mobile Solutions (LMMS) technology. A joint initiative between WV, other humanitarian organisations and the private sector resulted in the development of a tool called LMMS – currently used in WV's humanitarian programmes to digitally register beneficiaries and accurately assess and track who has received relief services. LMMS technology has been deployed in 17 WV country programmes to date.

Key Accountability benefits relating to use of technology

- Digital records save beneficiary and staff time by avoiding duplication of effort – the system can automatically update things like beneficiary age, so no need to re-register the same person for a second programme/distribution.
- The system automatically stores data from previous transactions and can detect and help avoid 'double-dipping'.
- Tracks which employee signed the beneficiary up, so can quickly follow up any discrepancies and errors.
- This technology turns "beneficiaries" into "customers" – people express feelings of empowerment when they have an electronic registration card. They are not lining up to ask for hand-outs, this card entitles them to services and we must deliver.
- Information about clients is protected, because details are stored safely on a server while the card just has name, photo and bar code on it.
- Instant reporting means that each interaction becomes an information-gathering and learning opportunity.
- Significantly speeds up reporting time as all the information is accessible digitally and can be downloaded into reports. This increases staff productivity.

Key Accountability challenges relating to the use of technology

Geo-tagging – the accountability challenges

Geo-tagging enables the geographic location in which images are taken or information collected to be recorded. While there are benefits to this, there are also some potential risks to beneficiaries. For example, the safety and security of some groups (certain refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, GBV victims) can be compromised if they are identified or their location revealed.

People should not lose out on opportunities to receive aid because they are concerned about their geographic location being known, and on the opposite end of the scale, in desperate situations people may put themselves at risk by providing whatever consent is asked because they need urgent help and don't care or are not aware of the longer term consequences. In these cases, what is the responsibility of the agency to protect these people?

How much can we expect from people as far as understanding the implications of geo-tagging?

Informed Consent

Beneficiaries must have control over how their information is used and informed consent is essential for this. However, it is not clear whether clients/beneficiaries fully understand the implications of informed consent. Agency staff may also not fully understand what they're doing when they tick the "informed consent received" box (on the WV LMMS system) – obtaining informed consent seems more about agencies 'covering their own backs' than about beneficiaries understanding how their personal data will be stored and used. There are particular challenges to obtaining informed consent for information concerning children or for absent family members included in a group registration – in this case information may be gathered about individuals without their knowledge.

Many agencies, such as WV, already have policies on informed consent, but the challenge is in the implementation and enforcing of these policies.

Ensuring informed consent: where people provide information or opinions, they should understand the whole process by which the information should be used. They should also be aware of any recommendations or decisions that are made on the basis of their input (ALNAP report CDA, 2011).

Further information is needed on:

1. The extent to which agencies are requesting and receiving informed consent.

2. The different methods of obtaining informed consent and how well clients understand the concept of digital data and the implications of having their data collected.

3. To what extent existing agency policies on informed consent and data privacy are being implemented and enforced.

4. More information is required on the costs vs the benefits of higher benchmarks for informed consent.

5. What existing guidelines address data protection during interagency collaboration.

Other technologies to consider:

Radio communications, crowd seeding, crowd sourcing, crisis mapping (Facebook and Twitter)

Recommendations concerning informed consent:

- Always assess how necessary the information being collected is, and do not collect any more than we need.
- Ensure that protocols and guidelines on data collection and storage exist.
- Require education and training for staff on collecting and accessing client data.
- Minimise collection and retention of sensitive data .
- Determine who can control and access sensitive data.
- MOU to be signed off by orgs and staff accessing data.
- Ensure compliance with existing government regulations on data management.
- Agencies should consider collaboration to avoid working in silos and avoid duplicating efforts on technology development.
- Agencies need to share platforms in order to reduce beneficiaries having to register with multiple agencies and use different registration cards.
- Consider how the system and the information collected can be used sustainably after the project ceases. A system should be set up not just for agency purposes but to stay with the people who need it after agencies leave.

Available Resources

WV will soon have new guidelines on storage times and use of beneficiary information post-project (Reference Gabriele and WV's new chief info security officer).

Gabriele: There is an upcoming summit in California next month – I intend to bring that subject up. I don't have an answer right now, but that's a discussion that we have to have.

ICRC protection standards has section on protection of data.

Institutional Barriers to Accountability

This session explored the institutional barriers to strengthening accountability to communities. The session was facilitated by Barb Wigley (WFP) and Carla Benham (WVI) and started off with some encouraging words: Even though barriers still exist, we need to keep in mind how far we've come. There is now more understanding of what constitutes accountability (effective consultation, for example) compared to the past. Accountability is making a place in organisations and leadership is beginning to provide support for accountability. With time, new donor requirements, and more clarity, it has gotten better. However, there is now a perception that accountability is already 'happening' because it's in our policies, but in reality we still need evidence that what is in the policy is actually being implemented on the ground. There is also a question of where accountability best sits within an organisation.

The session focussed on participants' own experiences and asked them to identify and then suggest solutions to existing intuitional barriers at four levels (headquarters, country office, donor and field level staff and partners) within a fictitious agency. The points raised by the different participant groups have been amalgamated for each level.

Headquarters

Current barriers

- Lack of understanding of what accountability means or entails
- Concept of accountability to donors vs accountability to people
- Accountability perceived as a "negative" – something that exposes weaknesses
- Inflexible accountability systems/standards (from the start, or becoming inflexible due to compliance culture)
- Where accountability sits in a organisation can be a barrier – it has to be both horizontal and vertical
- Must be embedded across all structures
- Accountability in certain contexts can pose risks to an organisation
- Remoteness from field, communities and partners, and proximity to donors, results in disconnect between policies and practices

Possible causes

- Leadership silos preventing holistic approach to developing accountability systems
- No inclusion in performance evaluations or job descriptions
- Bad attitude at leadership level
- Lack of understanding, perception and capacities
- Lack of proper positioning of accountability (not across the organisation)
- HQ focus on policy and compliance, divorced from practice

Suggestions to address barriers at HQ level

- Address the leaders first – their perception, their understanding – to obtain ownership and buy-in.
- With leaders, analyse how accountability is embedded in different layers of the organisation
- Action plan, based on opportunities identified, including different levels of the organisation (looking at staff skills and competencies, systems, etc.)
- Establish policy on how you bring staff on board
- Get senior leadership engaged and out of their silos

National Leadership Level

Current barriers

- What the senior leadership are measured against does not include accountability issues
- Lack of clarity about what accountability means – word is used to say different things
- Accountability is often organised as part of individual programmes/ projects, rather than part of organisational culture, systems and structures
- Dependent on donor agendas

Possible causes

- Funding constraints
- Staff – dedicated, skilled accountability champions?
- Not included in performance evaluations
- Arrogance of "knowing what communities want" – no need to ask
- Lack of clarity about what accountability means
- Not built into structures and monitoring

Suggestions to address barriers at country-office level

- Create culture of accountability using case studies and best practices
- Push use of end-of-project data for later initiatives
- On-going internal and external training
- Include accountability in JDs and performance evaluations
- Simply clarify what accountability is and get SLT to own accountability

Donors

Current barriers

- Different donors have different expectations
- Donor priorities impact accountability
- Double standards and talking-not-walking
- Donor/media attention is short-term, and accountability is not an attractive topic for attracting funding
- Value-for-money – difficult argument
- Should be part of a job description – if not, why should donors give funding for it?

Possible causes

- Double standards, don't walk the talk, don't measure
- Shifting priorities or low priorities, which affects accountability
- Short-term thinking, rigid requirements
- Value-for-money, focus on outputs rather than impact (can we demonstrate?
- Dollar-driven, from RFP
- Agenda changes

Suggestions to address barriers at donor level

- Need to provide donors with evidence of impact of accountability and assessment of development outcomes
- Demonstrate the link between accountability and outcomes
- IASC (or other inter-agency forums to advocate to donors) – we should push donors on this front

Field-level Staff and Partners

Current barriers

- Interest in pursuing accountability, but feeling that there will just be a long string of complaints
- May simply not see the need to act or the incentives
- Not enough resources to address complaints
- Short-term projects and high turnover
- Appropriate tools not available
- Reputational risk
- Different understandings (cultural/language) of accountability
- Closeness to community (lack of objective distance) creates challenges to accountability

Possible causes

- Lack of understanding and fear of accountability practices
- Lack of resources
- Not included in job descriptions/performance evaluations from the beginning
- Giving communities power, being exposed to criticism
- Incentives not there
- Not in line with local cultural norms and demands for local contextualisation

Suggestions to address barriers at field level

- Link accountability to political systems/understandings
- Connecting to people's right to hold staff accountable
- Staff focus on learning rather than blaming
- Clear standards, procedures, processes and resources in place to empower staff
- Job descriptions! Who is responsible for what?
- Modelling accountability in your organisation so that it can be practiced and understood by staff
- Training and learning – does not need to be high-level
- Staff should not fear repercussions for reporting shortcomings

Accountability and Empowerment

The session was facilitated by WV staff members Karim Sahyoun, Bill Walker and Mikhael Pradhan and included a presentation by Isabella Jean of the CDA Listening Programme. The session began by acknowledging that the central issue in accountability has to do with power.

Participants shared their views on what they each considered the one key thing that contributes to community empowerment for accountability. The following table contains participants' quotes.

What contributes to empowerment?	Category
• Mapping actors and understanding context • Mapping the different community groups and different power relationships • Understanding local contexts	*Process*
• Share more information about how and why • Communities need to know what our organisations commit to do before that can hold us to account • Should be aware of their rights and should know development actors responsibilities • Awareness-raising • Educate and create awareness among communities around accountability • Give the population an idea of what we do and how we work and explain our complexity and entry points • Internet • Easy transparent and timely information	*Informing and creating awareness*
• Examples of positive results and experience (communities to NGOs) • Move from rhetoric to practical action, talk through best practices and tools	*Motivating with experiences and best practice*
• Direct involvement in programme DM&E • Real community participation during the project cycle • Be part of decision making • Provide a core and clear role for communications in strategic and programming development • Course of advocacy – that their voice counts	*Community involvement in decisions and DM&E*
• Empowering people to demand their rights – changing attitudes from "beneficiaries" of aid to its rightful owners • Train/create trust in communities to give their feedback without losing benefits or fear of retaliation	*Empowering to demand rights*
• Go public with beneficiary feedback	*Go public with complaints and feedback*

Definitions tend to identify accountability in terms of answerability – the ability of clients to get answers from agencies – but this includes an assumption of dialogue and the ability to enforce or sanction. This is not enough, there has to be access to redress, beyond simple enforcement or sanction.

The Listening Project

Isabella Jean of the CDA's Listening Programme presented some background and findings from the Listening Project and the recently published book Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid.

The Listening Project (LP) is a collaborative learning effort to listen to those who have received, participated in or observed international assistance. LP gathered evidence on the cumulative effects of aid efforts and ideas on making international aid more effective. Between 2005 and 2009, 130 international and local aid agencies were engaged in listening exercises conducted in 20 countries. In total, listening teams spoke to 6,000 people. The listening exercises also allowed space for consultation and contemplation with aid providers. The listening exercises took place in different contexts, including places where assistance has been given for decades (Ethiopia) and those where people had very little prior experience with assistance (Aceh). Although the contexts were very different, people's experiences with assistance and its cumulative impacts were actually quite similar.

The Listening Project looked at cumulative impacts over time and as a whole. The overall experience is that aid providers drive decision-making, and recipients are "consulted" on decisions that have already been made far away. Those on the receiving end of aid want to see significant, lasting and positive changes in their lives, communities and societies – not just from a single agency, but from the aid system as a whole. They want good relationships and trustworthy interactions.

Recently, more specific requests have emerged, including the need for access to basic information about the programmes agencies run and what their expected outcomes are supposed to be. The biggest message is that people want and need a seat at the table. Local people expressed surprise about how little transparency and accountability they've seen over time.

Answerability goes both ways – recipients have a responsibility to express themselves as well. Even those in positions of some authority (an example was given of a doctor who was receiving inappropriate supplies) are often reluctant to complain. That feedback has to be given for the discussion to work and for improvements to take place.

Critical factors for accountability – discussion points:

- Importance of proximity/regular staff presence: if frontline staff are in the communities and have time to spend with recipients there's almost no need for separate, explicit accountability systems – they fill that gap.
- Restrict "proceduralisation": Procedures displace established and meaningful mechanisms that people are already using. Don't over-engineer the process!
- Contextualisation – Accountability should be embedded in programming and contextualised – both from the point of view of local culture and institutional context as well.
- In long-term development programmes it is important to maintain on-going discussion and collaboration
- Participation and consultation with communities – Under whose terms is this being designed?
- Community involvement from the beginning is preventative – it de-escalates complaints and tensions later.
- "Ask Them" – create a platform to listen.

The Listening Project's Findings on NGO-Community Partnership

Isabella Jean presented some findings from CDA research. The Listening Project – although mostly listening to beneficiaries – also had some conversations with INGO and local NGO partners to hear what they had to say.

Who are these intermediaries that we put trust in? "Be careful who you trust" is a common concern.

Control:

- People wanted to know how a relationship of trusting but verifying actually works in practice
- Having effective monitoring systems in place doesn't show a lack of confidence or partnership spirit
- People see the balance between trust and control as important when trying to maintain effective partnership: "Trust does not exclude control"
- Partnership: Let the local partners set the agenda, with the INGO coming in to provide the support and capacities that the local partners need.

Transparency is an important part of accountability:

- Beneficiaries are more willing to forgive the WHAT (missed deliveries, wrong support, etc.) than the HOW (being unresponsive, dismissive, closed, behaving disrespectfully, etc.)
- Local partners want to know quickly if a mistake has been made
- Trust is a prerequisite for good communications

Why Link Sustainability and Accountability?

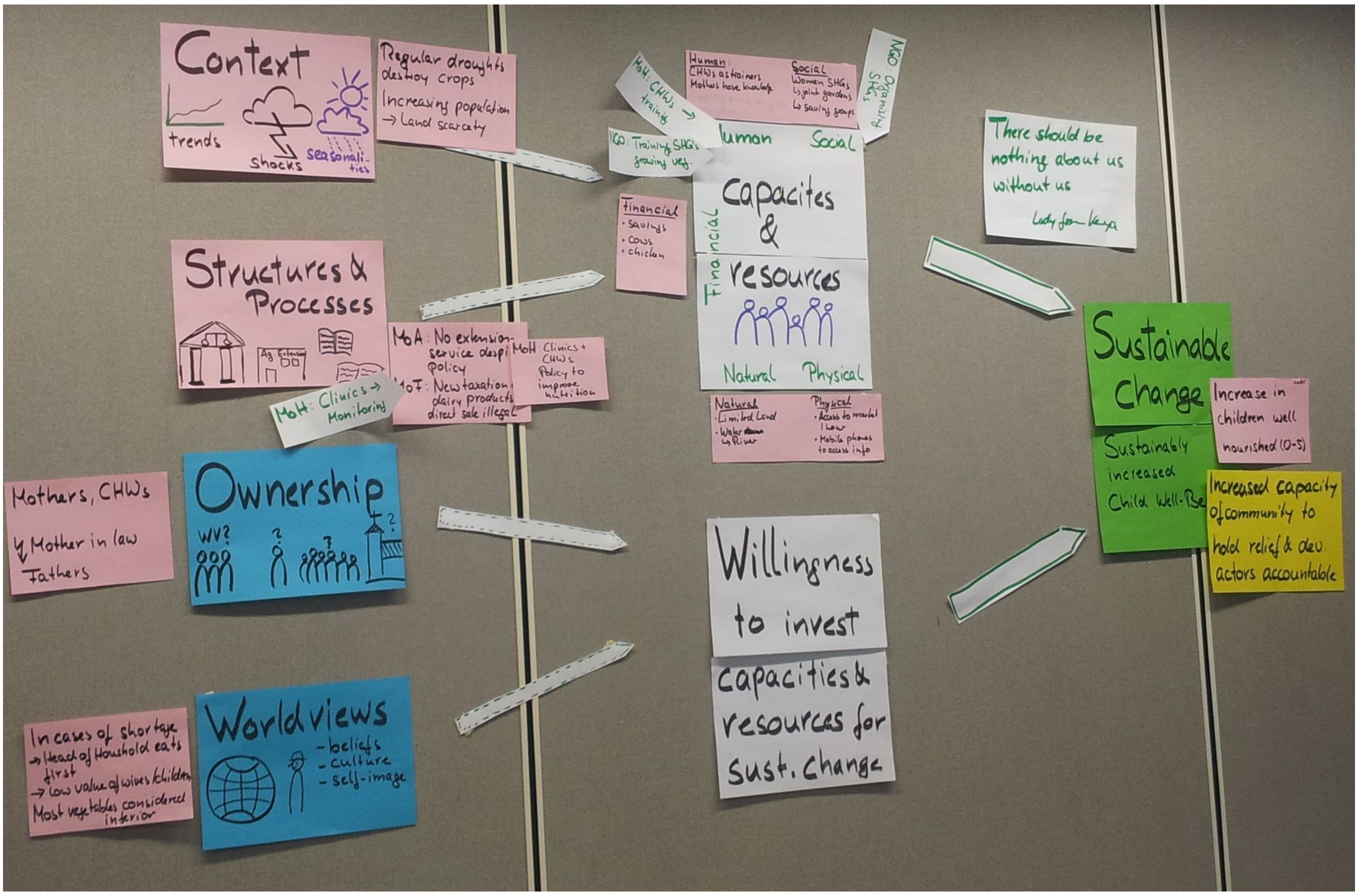
From a presentation by Karim Sahyoun (World Vision)

- It is important to develop a culture among actors to be accountable to the community.
- Agencies should be working with communities to set systems that are sustainable in the community (e.g., children's participation). These things should continue beyond our project.
- Communities must also deal with many different agencies and they want to hold all of them accountable. So how can we strengthen the capacity of the community to sustain that?

In supporting sustainability and accountability, agencies need to work with communities to assess and take into consideration the existing community structures and power dynamics. Mapping helps to:

- Find out what is already there.
- Allow the identification of possible points of intervention.
- See who is already operating at what level within a community.
- Promote ownership of the process – agencies must aim for a truly unguided consultative design process.

The next step is to decide how to strengthen what exists, identifying stakeholders, involving them in joint decision-making, and then carrying out joint monitoring that keeps track of what each party has committed to and whether they are meeting their commitments.



It's important to consider worldviews, because not everyone will be inclined to agree with the agency's idea of empowerment, or with the importance of focusing on children in society.

When the map is finished, you can begin community consultations and establish the current ability of the community to hold an agency to account. You can agree on what exactly that means and what it should address – agreement will depend on the context, and what it is matters less than mutual agreement on definitions of roles for all parties.

This is about helping communities to see for themselves where the challenges are. There's a degree of training involved in this, because you're often dealing with people who have never experienced accountability before – from family right up to state level – so this is an educational exercise.

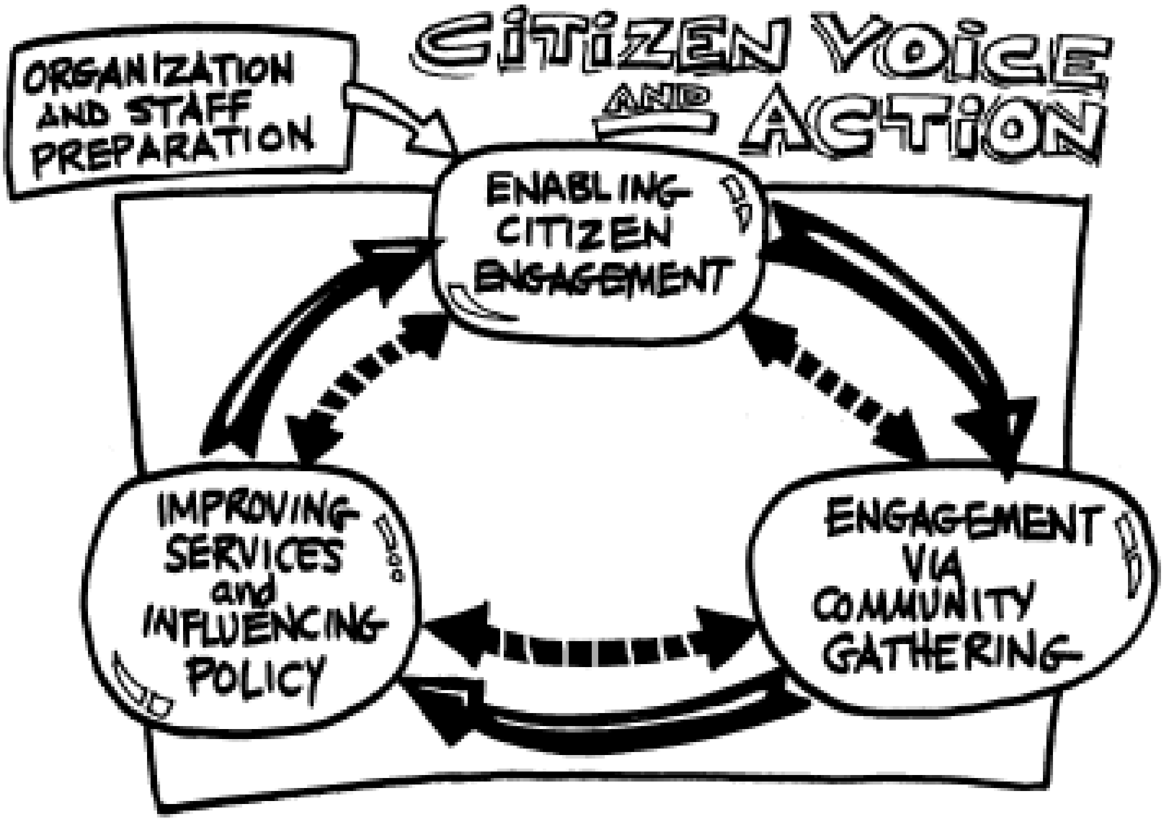
Citizen Voice and Action (CV&A)

Presentation by Bill Walker (World Vision)

World Vision's CV&A programme is built on work that has been done by social movements around the world and especially in India. WV initially worked in Brazil and Uganda, then India and Papua New Guinea as the programme was scaled up. It is now in 34 countries and 250 programmes – other NGOs are interested and communities are requesting it. CV&A:

- Is focused on accountability at a local level and working with communities and partners
- Uses a strengths-based, rights-based approach – it's a systems-thinking approach, applicable to anything
- Recognises that there are barriers to accountability within a community, but also that the solutions lie within the communities – they know what's happening
- Sets out to be community-driven (health, education, but also living standards, gender, etc.)
- Is solutions-oriented, not confrontational – as well as bringing the law to bear, some initiatives actually *make* laws.

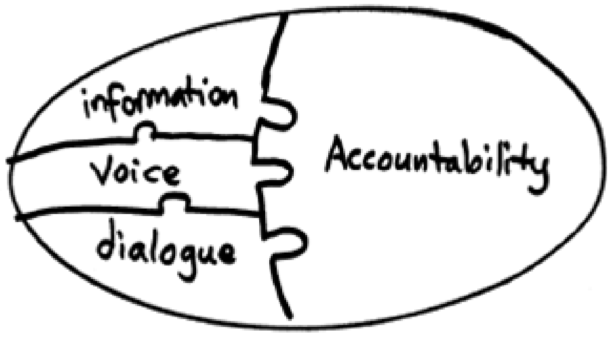
The basic CV&A process is as follows:



It involves communities discussing with each other about the power imbalances they have, and how to address them. They then agree on what will happen and who will be responsible for what. The community learns what it means to be engaged in public accountability, and there's a spill over effect into other areas, too – they can start applying their capacity for advocacy to other things.

In order for the CVA process to work, there is a need for:

- Community organising skills
- Transparency – it's a two-way process, as communities need to know what service providers' obligations are (school – how many teachers should there be, how many books, etc.), and service providers need to receive feedback about services from communities
- Dialogue – citizens are diagnosing and evaluating



Linking CVA methodology to WV's accountability

The CV&A process has been applied by WV to enable citizens to hold their government service providers to account for quality of service provision. So why aren't we doing this for WV? Recently WV has started to experiment with the CV&A approach to enable programme communities to hold WV to account and WV India is one of the first to pilot the use of CV&A methodology in this way.

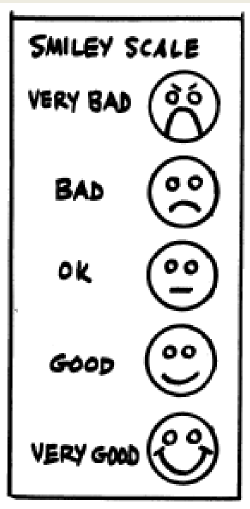
Mikhael Pradhan of WV India presented the initial findings from the pilot conducted in WV India's Mayurbhanj Area Development Programme. This is the first attempt at applying the CV&A methodology to allow the community to assess WV's 'performance'. The rationale for using this approach is that accountability and performance are inextricably linked – when accountability is high, performance is inevitably high and this is what programmes are aiming for.

The objectives of World Vision India's CV&A study pilot were to:

- Assess the relevance and application of the CV&A Tool in measuring WV's services
- Assess the adaptability of the CV&A tool in measuring WV services in community context
- Assess the quality and effectiveness of WV services delivered to communities
- Identify the Limitation & Challenges in applying the CV&A tool in the community context
- Scope for future roll-out in measuring WV services though ADPs

The steps followed were:

- Select location for CV&A assessment (Mayurbhanj Progamme Area)
- Develop a set of measurable performance indicators for the Mayurbhanj programme – quality, efficiency and timeliness of service delivery
- Field test these monitoring standards
- Facilitator's orientation & documentation process;
- Focus Group Discussion with stakeholders and use of score cards
- Data analysis
- Review and feedback



Learning from the study and participant discussion

The study was undertaken not to identify best practices or things to improve, but as a proof of concept. It is important to be able to justify the indicators chosen. In this study it would have been better to reduce the number of indicators and make it more useful. An option is to start with the quantitative data at the beginning, and then narrow to qualitative data in a subsequent survey.

The process of feeding back to the community forces you to be more thorough in analysing the data, and you scale back to what you can use because you actually HAVE to analyse it. Need common ownership – maybe needs to be split into parts – what we want to know, what the community wants to know, what partners might want to know… that's the only way to promote common ownership.

Discussion on CV&A

- In India, social accountability movements have been very important (since the Bhopal incident) and CV&A builds on this.
- It can be done in a non-confrontational way if people are provided with the right strategies. It is not a fault-finding process, it is a fact-finding process. The agreement is that the parties will look for a solution, not apportion blame.
- This would work in a mature community, but it assumes a certain level of comfort with communication and interaction with officials.
- CV&A is not a complaints mechanism. But we need to differentiate between individual complaints and generalised issues. So, for instance, "the teachers aren't showing up for classes". The community may find out that policy calls for one teacher per 55 students, but it was actually one per 250. If there are not enough teachers, then it's a community problem that has a) more weight behind it and b) less risk for individual complainants.
- Question: Is it unethical to help people demand services if the service provider doesn't have the capacity to respond? Response: every government in the world has standards for the schools in their country – this standard, that they themselves have established, provides the basis for a CV&A assessment. The process brings the service providers on board, because they win – the communities demand that their schools have the resources they are supposed to have, so the education department can demonstrate their need for resources.
- A community score board has been used within CARE Nepal-supported health projects to monitor service provision. The practice was considered successful and is being duplicated elsewhere. Community Health Score board: http://carenepal.org/bulliten/_CHSB.pdf

Accountability in Partnership at the Local Level

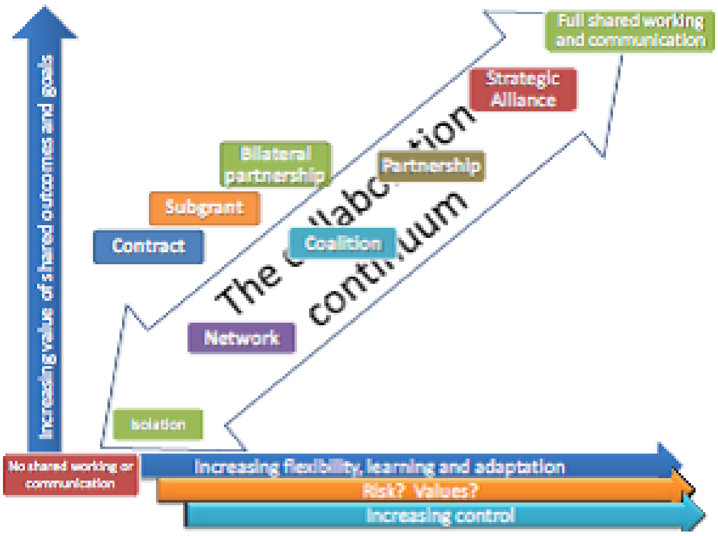
World Vision, like many other agencies, works in partnership at local level with local authorities, national and International NGOs, CBOs and interest groups. Having such a diverse range of actors, many of whom are intermediaries between WV and individual community members, brings challenges – especially around information sharing, consultation and collecting and acting on feedback and complaints.

Setting the scene

What are we talking about when we talk about partners and partnering?

Types of partnering relationship

The type and number of partners within a project will vary depending on the kinds of outcomes wanted and the manner of cooperation most appropriate. A lot of partnering ends up pairing like with like (such as NGOs and NGOs), which is much easier in terms of reducing risk of conflict, but also less transformative.



Types of 'partnership':

Partnership - Many partners in one project, with each partner having an impact on the project. There is mutual accountability in a partnership.

Network - An information-sharing group with many stakeholders. Accountability is looser, but there are many opportunities for peer learning.

Coalition - An effective way of creating accountability without involving the pitfalls of a resource-sharing agreement; useful when working towards local-level partnership.

Partnering is one of those words that people feel they need to include in everything. Everyone partners, they have to, but are they good at it? Do they know what they mean when they say it?

WV's Critical Path (the steps programmes follow in order to build up effective, mutually-beneficial and collaborative relationships with communities) maps out the way WV works with communities and has deliberately opened the door to looking at all kinds of actors as potential partners.

Questions posed to participants: *Who works with partners and why? What are the organisational drivers?*

- We work with partners everywhere we can, to be closer to building capacity and sustainability when we leave.
- Drivers differ in every programme, but reach, access, and the trust that local actors already command are all partnering advantages.
- We work with partners to avoid duplication of services, to have more power to achieve aims.
- Partnering can be good at mitigating weaknesses on both sides – partners take advantage of and complement each other's strengths.
- Partnering with academics – it brings an important element, because we need good quality research (WV Australia).
- Specific technical partners provide skills and expertise that the agency may be lacking – e.g., technology development for communication applied in the Speed Evidence Process (WV).
- Local partners provide established relationships with communities and can speed up access during humanitarian response, such as during the 2011 floods.

Other factors

A passionate commitment to the shared and defined goal, even if there isn't always agreement on what to do.

- Goals have to be specific, measurable and achievable
- Define the roles, and make use of the collective input
- Take time to invest in negotiation with partners.

Key success factors in partnering:

- Transparency of goal and transparency of achievement
- Respect
- Responsiveness
- Mutual benefit – are everyone's interests being served?
- Adaptation

There are four reasons to partner: **SEAL**.

- **S**ustainability
- **E**ffectiveness
- **A**ccountability
- **L**egitimacy

Sharing some common values is also a useful thing – this can keep a partnership going through tough periods when it isn't obvious that progress is being made.

Diversity helps – with a good variety of inputs and different skill sets, a small number of people can put together some great ideas.

A partnership agreement that outlines what each is responsible for – timelines, financial aspects, basically what each is bringing to the table – mapping of stakeholder relationships is part of this. MOUs should only be used where they add value.

Large organisations and small organisations have different things to achieve through partnering, and will have different amounts of commitment/risk invested in the process.

Accountability and Partnership

There are three elements of accountability in partnership and all are important.

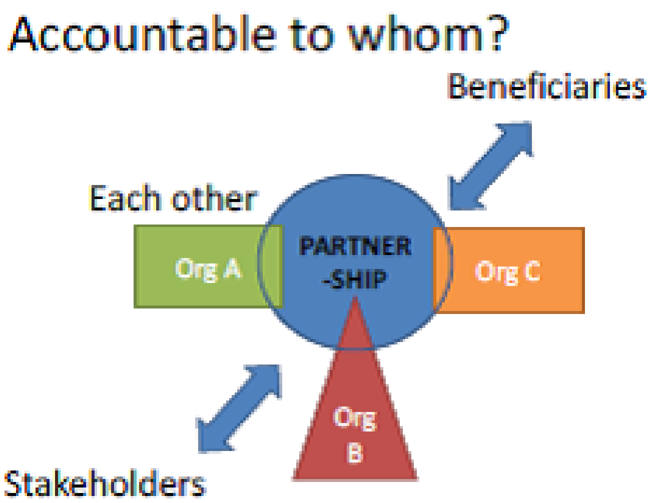
Accountability WITHIN partnerships
Accountability THROUGH partnerships
Accountability WITH partners (e.g. in a network or coalition)

This session focused on accountability THROUGH partnership – how agencies can ensure that they can be held to account by communities for the quality of their programmes and behaviour of staff. In order to do this we also need to be accountable to our partners, so accountability WITHIN the partnership part is also important. We need to implement the same accountability practices with our partners as we do with communities (sharing information, ensuring consultation, participation and feedback and complaints).

Accountability frameworks will also be different for each partner – WV and our partners do different things, so our accountabilities look different from each other. It isn't a simple organisation where one accountability framework is going to be equally and appropriately applicable to all parties in the same way.

Some practical challenges to accountability when working in partnership are:

- What happens in a negotiation where you arrive with your own accountability standards, and your partners have their own?
- How do you work with partners in difficult-to-access areas (like Afghanistan)? How can you negotiate an informed agreement when you can't go there and don't know what they're doing?
- There is a general idea of what the elements of a partnership are, but no agreement on what the final structure looks like.
- Grassroots partnerships – Some CBO partners are groups of vulnerable people who are also beneficiaries of the project – they are inside the loop in the partnership (shown in the diagram above). Does this, and how does this, affect the partnering relationship?



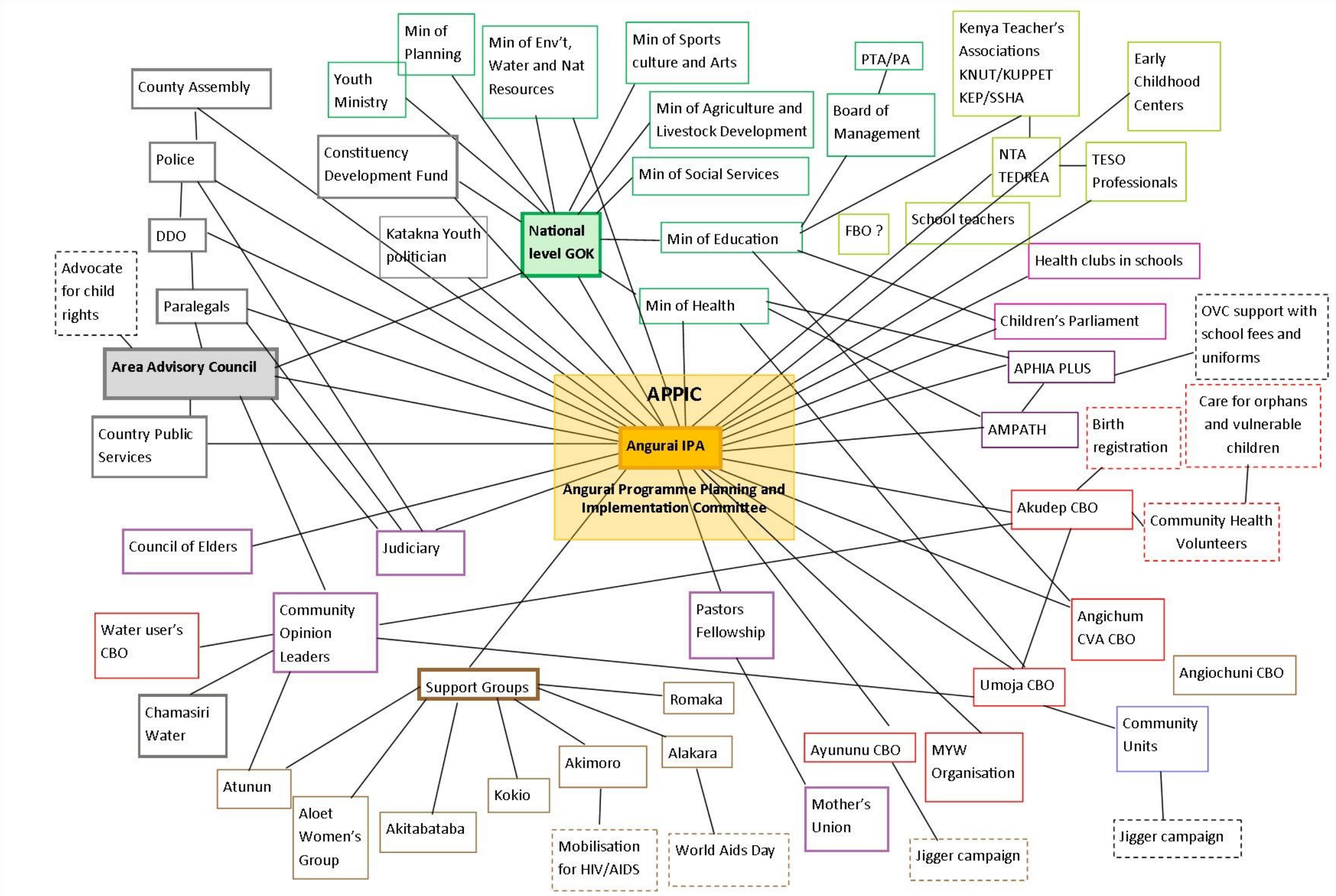
Kenya CRM Study

Anna Wood (WVI Senior Advisor, Accountability to Children and Communities) presented a case study from a WV development programme in Kenya (Angurai Integrated Programme Area) on complaints mechanisms in partnership.

The objective of the study was to identify good practice in accountability to communities via programme partners. The first step involved holding focus group discussions with different community groups (Government service providers, children, CBO members, community members, programme committee members) to map out existing project partnerships. There was no definition of partner given during the exercise except that they had to be groups currently helping WV implement the programme in some manner.

Combining the maps produced during each of the focus groups provided the composite relationship map shown below. WV Angurai is in the centre.

WV Angurai works with around 40 community partners.



Angurai ADP is one of WV's most progressively partnership-focused programmes. It is a relatively mature programme, having been established more than five years ago.

Most relationships between WV and its partners consist of WV providing funding, training, capacity, and getting support to implement and monitor the programme, plus greater reach into, and extensive coverage of, the community. Partners are expected to provide financial and progress reports in return.

Community members and partners interviewed seemed to be very aware of the connections between WV and its partners – despite the complexity of those relationships.

All those interviewed reported a high level of trust between WV and the programme partners. There are regular formal and informal programme coordination meetings – the largest being the Angurai Programme Planning and Implementation Committee (APPIC), which can host over 100 individuals.

One of the key benefits of this meeting is that partners and WV exchange information about the programme, but also take the opportunity to give each other feedback and raise complaints. Other groups such as the children's parliament (although not a programme partner) are now also attending this meeting. There was consensus that this open way of sharing information helped partners hold each other to account and resolve issues before they become more serious complaints.

In order to look at the flow of feedback and complaints, each FDG was asked: To whom would an individual community member go if they wanted to make a complaint about the conduct of a WV staff member (examples of dangerous driving and suspected sexual abuse were used)? In nearly all cases the community member would not go directly to WV, but to the Area Advisory Council or police, and WV will only find out about the incident at a later stage.

Community members should be aware of their right to complain, of the standards they can expect in terms of WV programme quality and staff behaviour, and of how to complain. This awareness relies on communities and partners having access to information on these standards and procedures.

Further findings and discussion

Little current awareness – there is a need to encourage awareness of existing complaint mechanisms and agency organisational standards, so people know what they can appeal against.

A complaint/suggestion box does exist for the WV Angurai office, but it is not much used as people are unsure who will open it and read the complaints.

Keeping it local – people will be hesitant to complain if it goes to the WV National Director, but if it will be addressed by a local committee in their community, they might be more inclined to start that process.

There are local structures that people go to first to handle civil-type disputes anyway, so that's there as a resource.

Give staff and partners guidelines to handle complaints about WV.

A community suggestion and complaint box is just a box, it's not the process. The whole system – making sure people are able and informed enough to complain – is what you need to have in place.

Many complaint mechanisms are designed for emergencies, not optimised for development. More work needs to be done on how to function in development settings.

Changing the Way we Partner

Power differentials between partners and especially INGOs and local partners are often acknowledged in an academic way, but little is done to address it. We all believe in empowerment of individuals, but we don't talk about empowering partnerships to impact the system. Really, the local partner should be the one identifying international partners, rather than the other way around – question of whether we're ready to cede them that kind of power.

Good practices when working in partnership:

- Due diligence processes
- Partnership "Health Check" survey
- Good Partnership – recognising that partnerships are dynamic, and not just focusing on an MOU or agreement, but seeing the partnership through its life

It's part of the context analysis to see what the partner capacities are and, if needed, there should be capacity-building on accountability for partners included in the partnership itself. That could be one of the goals of the partnership. We have to be very careful about identifying which capacities they have already (even if in a slightly different form than what we expect) so that we're not *replacing* existing capacities.

Discussion

How useful and widely used are staff feedback journals? There has to be a range of options – it's necessary anyway, since each vulnerable person needs an avenue to give feedback. Informal ones can supplement, but of course these aren't trackable.

How much do you formalise the feedback and complaints procedures? This is a big question. In the '80s, there was more proximity and less talk of accountability. Now, we need these mechanisms to generate the trust they don't have any more. Where they have proximity, such as in Port-au-Prince, staff have little books that they use to write down complaints they receive in the course of a day, which produces a carbon copy of the recorded complaint. In Pakistan, a hotline provides an avenue to bypass local partners in the case of lack of trust – if trust is there, they can deal with complaints locally.

Potential conflict of interest - partners support the implementation of WV's programme activities, and most also receive direct support in some form from WV. What is their incentive to report a complaint against WV, or help a community member report a complaint against WV?

There also needs to be a functioning and independent mechanism. The process cannot rely solely on a community system (in case of conflict of interest) or on a WV system (as people may not feel comfortable to raise an issue with WV if a WV staff member is the perpetrator).

A WV-wide Integrity and Protection Hotline (IPH) does exist. Although it its designed for WV staff to report against other staff (whistle blower) and not meant for the community, it is not generally well advertised with WV offices. Staff need to know the IPH is there and the community need to know that WV has a system like this in place that staff can use.

Other Points about Partnership

- Local partners want shared goals and shared strategies – you have to have some very fundamental discussions right up front about what you want to accomplish – Lasting change, not project-completion.
- Risk of building a "project society", and not a "civil society" – examples of Kosovo and Lebanon.
- How do you nurture accountability mechanisms in these situations, and how do you monitor them? How do you structure them?
- Implications for **how** we do it, but the risk of that is forgetting about the **who.**
- There's a cost, and we have to be honest about what the costs will be. Practise in the field is very challenging
- What do we do about partners who take other partners that we have problems with?
- Grassroots leadership – how do you determine it, encourage it, foster it? Should you?

Modelling good behaviour, good procedures can go a long way (and either way, it's what you have to do), so that you're not treating partnership as a transactional relationship.

Concluding Remarks

(Ian DeVilliers, World Vision)

Partner / beneficiary: definitions can be fuzzy, but we really need to be clear about them.

We recognise the complexity, but let's not over-engineer. There's no way we can have dozens of quality partnership agreements, so some will have to be allowed to be what they are.

Groups with Less Voice

Children

The session on children was presented by Anna Aleksanyan, WV Armenia's Child Sponsorship Officer.

The presentation opened with a description of a project in WV Armenia designed to help children with less voice have their issues heard, within their homes and in their community.

One example is the "I Love You, Dad" calendar, produced by Yerevan Area Development Programme (ADP), which includes children's ideas for things they want to say when seeking attention and care. The calendar includes messages each month to fathers ("Please don't smoke inside the house") and reminders for children about their roles within the household (help with the chores, etc.).

There is also a children-initiated TV programme, Let's Talk, supported by the municipality.

Other WV Armenia projects to help children have their voices heard include the Gyumri ADP photo project Our Yard is Our Face, a video shot and edited by children in Alaverdi ADP showing how their community was affected by pollution from a local factory, and a Stepanavan ADP children's campaign on the International Day Against Tobacco.

There are challenges to working with and empowering children. Some of these are highlighted in the following Q&A and discussion:

Can we be a good model to children if we don't empower them to demand accountability from us (WV)? Can we send the wrong message if we only encourage them to demand from others, but not from us?

We make efforts to empower them to demand things from others, but this concept is now being used to provide training that will allow them to hold WV to account.

This is an important idea, but there are still adults involved, and there is a potential cost – the children can challenge the factory owners, but their parents could get punished for that!

The principles of Do No Harm are very important. When it is part of an overall process, it's better, so it's not just the children out on their own. In the case involving pollution, the issues are being pursued through other channels, too. These are well-known problems. Do No Harm is an important consideration, and it sometimes holds us back from working on these types of issues.

If we charge in to a community looking to empower women, for example, but we don't change the society, then when we're done we might leave them hanging. We can't set people up to be at risk.

We have to work with them in the context that they're in. It's about giving people the tools, and then giving them the option to use those tools. Children can engage in critical thinking, having them turn that on us is actually a pretty good and safe (assumedly) test case for that.

There is a difference between children and adults – adults can decide for themselves, with children it's a bit more tricky, they need to be protected from exposing themselves to risks – to what extent do you involve parents in that?

Child protection risk assessment is very important here – all of the standards described in the risk assessment procedure re: parents, staff, etc., have to be followed.

How do you define empowerment? "Agency, relationships and structures", can't just increase agency without the others. Consultation, information sharing, feedback and complaints, participation: how do we encourage these among children?

We use the citizenship approach – same idea as children's democracy.

Do they need it, or do they just need a safe space to talk? children can be less inhibited about voicing opinions than adults. But, having space to talk is not the same as being listened to – they may be able to voice their opinions, but they are not listened to, so it's a double-edged sword.

What are we thinking children should hold us accountable for? What's the benefit for the children, and how does that guide our approach?

First step has to involve the children in the process, so that they have a say in the decision of what they can hold us accountable for. Children have a different view of what's important, and different perspectives.

From the beginning, in all stages, children have a role – in many of the programmes they can do monitoring, such as in beneficiary selection. If local leaders choose beneficiaries, children know who is in need, and can check whether or not that's right.

Also, in WV specifically, we use children's images to raise money, so we have an extra responsibility to be accountable to them.

Is there really any additional difference between children and other vulnerable groups in this regard? Do you really approach children differently when you do accountability?

Children are an often overlooked group, so we need extra effort and considerations for them. And we do require different mechanisms and skill sets to interact with children. It's hugely dependant on the skill set of the people doing the consultations – agencies have an obligation to make sure the right person is running it. It is very different from talking to adults. It takes some time to train them and get them to respond, but once they're accustomed to it, they become very responsive.

Technology provides options too – but the mechanism can be anything. It's just a question of how to encourage participation. We could also, for example, use something like the happy-face index, to do a health check with children on programmes. Potentially, the most impact would come from letting children select their own indicators.

The World Vision Development Programme Approach also contains toolkits, guidelines and recommendations on how to ensure that there is consultation with children. Newer programmes should now already have consultation in-built.

We encourage children to share their views through pictures and storyboards. In one place, children were taken through a process where they talked about the greatest needs in the community. A lot of them kept drawing birds, so we had a discussion about why, and turns out they were pests that the children had the job of keeping away from crops. It was a big problem, and the children were taken out of school during the period that these birds were migrating through.

You will hear really uncomfortable things from kids – hard to respond to!

It seems manipulative, to an extent, to empower children. The emotions of a child and inability to understand consequences introduces risks that need to be mitigated. Are we going to empower children to speak up politically, or just to ourselves?

Best thing is always to ask the children, "how are you comfortable providing feedback?" They can guide that. Also, giving them a safe place, you can allow their sometimes-wacky ideas to be aired.

The Do No Harm approach (as described before) is also followed.

Empowering children should be done inter-generationally. In Brazil, CV&A started with empowering adults, then extended to youth, then the youth began to mentor children. There's a proximity that the youth have to children that gives them a rapport that a 40-year-old couldn't have. This can be built into a full community initiative, or alternatively can be run through schools.

Children's perspectives are different from our perspective, but not necessarily from the community's perspective – if they become empowered in one area then the likelihood that they'll transfer that to another area is greater.

Who's rights are affected? If a child is being abused, then their rights are definitely being affected. But if it's a programme for the elderly, then they're not. So you involve them where it's appropriate.

Long-term, if you involve children in this kind of thing, then they'll have those skills when they become adults, so that's a lasting outcome.

Older People

Magda Rossmann of HelpAge International concluded the session on those with less voice with a presentation on older people.

The facts concerning older people are:

- There are more adults over 60 than children under five in the world today, and by 2030 there is expected to be more over 60 than under 10 years old.
- Older people are not a homogenous group, of course, but a big demographic altogether.
- Who is defined as "old" depends on social and cultural constructs, but the UN defines as over 60.
- We think of it as a developed-world phenomenon, but actually it is also a developing-world phenomenon – the proportion is projected to double in Asia, Africa and Latin America in coming years.
- There are stereotypes about older people, but they are not true – worldwide, 47 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women over 60 still participate in the workforce.

Why are older people ignored?

- Their needs are misunderstood, they are not consulted. Consultation, when it occurs, needs to be very deliberate because the needs of a 60-year-old will not be the same as an 80-year-old.
- They are left behind because they are less mobile, can be isolated, may not even be aware of opportunities.
- Data about them is not collected – many surveys don't collect information on people over 49 years. This is essentially due to just ignoring people based on the fact that they are no longer of reproductive age – which is actually quite anti-feminist.
- People do not think older people have useful capacities, but the opposite is often true.

Programmes are not tailored to meet older people's specific needs:

- Food provided that is difficult/impossible for them to consume.
- Health focus is usually on communicable diseases, but for older people the main concern is chronic, non-communicable diseases.
- IDP camp in Uganda – 80 per cent of those who remained and couldn't leave when camp closed were older people. Similarly, three-quarters of those who remained behind in the conflict zone in Croatia were older.

Key actions:

- Disaggregation of data by age and sex
- Inclusion of older people in needs assessments
- Older people associations and older citizens' monitoring groups
- We (HelpAge International) have commissioned research on effectiveness of Older People Associations in emergency contexts, due out soon
- Be aware of how you package information and how you interact
- Particular sensitivities, such as unwillingness to talk about certain subjects
- Older people, especially men, are used to being respected and well-regarded, and may be having to adjust to now-diminished status, being ignored
- Tend to use a more traditional and religious frame in their interactions, Unlike children who often use imagination

How to talk to old people:

- Peaceful environment, good acoustics
- Speak clearly but not too loudly
- When possible, separate men and women
- Don't draw out meetings longer than 1.5 hours
- Discuss one topic at a time

Intergenerational help desks were set up in Kenya, received training on accountability and documentation as well as HIV and AIDS awareness.

We're still seeing what works and doesn't work, in terms of complaints handling.

We have a mix of people so that you have some representing each generation working together – that's part of the principle – and leveraging the knowledge and capacities that all of them have.

HelpAge International has a protection policy for children **and vulnerable adults**. Many of the measures for protection are not currently tailored to older people – for example sexual violence towards older women is still fairly taboo, and not talked about at all, but it does happen. Remember that gender doesn't disappear with age, and older women are even more vulnerable if they are lumped together with older men in the data and in that way disappear.

Comments and Questions from Participants

Q. Is there an assumption that being old implies being infirm?
Aged 0-40 you have a multiplicity of issues, and that continues through 60+. And let's not forget, there are opportunities being missed out on as well as needs. Some can be very valuable contributors. Once given opportunities to make contributions, they are often the most enthusiastic participants. At the other end of the spectrum, some older people have seen hundreds of NGOs come and go, so they may also be quite jaded about participating.

Q. There are different attitudes to age in different countries – do we take that into account? Often our frontline staff can be very young, and maybe they don't understand.
This is true, young programme officers may not be culturally sensitive or aware, and in some contexts older people would consider their approaches disrespectful. That could block interaction.

Q. Are there agencies available to partner with?
HelpAge International is in partnership with others regularly, such as in Jordan. We also have secondments.

Further Comments

Considering that in developing countries there's something to be said for the resilience of ANYONE who makes it to be 80 or 90 years old, it's strange that the capacities of these older people are not tapped into more.

Consultation with older people is important but it's quite time-consuming, because if older people aren't mobile, you have to go and find them (same applies to the disabled). It demands some kind of special treatment and a willingness to take the time.

We need to listen to older people more as talking to them can show our initial assumptions are completely wrong. For example, in the Sri Lankan civil war, agencies assumed that health would be the elderly's main concern, turns out that was wrong because they were mostly concerned with vision – many had lost their glasses.

In Armenia, young people don't take the elderly seriously – they respect them, care for them, but don't want to listen to them.

Sometimes the collective voice of older people is listened to. In India for example their *collective* voice is very respected and accepted – the government listens to them if they push as a group.

In the Japan Tsunami, HelpAge set up elderly/children joint consultation groups, which were very successful, and we want to replicate that elsewhere.

Older people can have a significant influence on the younger generation. Especially where Grandparents are taking care of children – that could be an overlap with focus on children. Our (all agencies) work is connected in some way. It's worth talking about these issues, not least because older people will inevitably become a bigger "target group" for other NGOs as populations continue to age globally.

In the case of older people, it all goes back to asking how they want to be involved and engaged – it's just basic!

Annex 1: Participants

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