Guidance: Accountability to Affected People (AAP) for organisations implementing Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund projects

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Introduction

The Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) says: "Partners that implement activities funded by the AHF are required to address the five Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Those requirements fall under:

- Leadership/governance;
- Transparency;
- Feedback/Complaints;
- Participation;
- Design Monitoring and Evaluation.

"At the project proposal stage, implementing partners are required to describe how affected populations and specific beneficiaries have been and will be involved throughout the humanitarian project cycle. AHF reporting and monitoring procedures verify how this has been applied."

This document provides suggestions for how partners in Afghanistan can fulfil AHF requirements and, more substantively, insert meaningful Accountability to Affected People (AAP) principles, policies and practices into project proposals and projects themselves. This guidance also can be used generally as a short manual on how to engage people in Afghanistan in all phases of humanitarian projects, so accountability becomes a natural and inseparable part of programming.

Definitions

Community engagement and AAP are interconnected. Community engagement and two-way communication between your project's participants and your organisation/project staff are how humanitarians pursue being accountable.

The IASC is a U.N. system humanitarian coordination forum that "brings together 18 Principals of United Nations and non-United Nations entities to ensure coherence of efforts, formulate policy, and discuss priorities for strengthened humanitarian action," according to its website. "The IASC is the primary coordination mechanism for coherent and timely international response to humanitarian emergencies." One of its five key priorities is "enhancing accountability and inclusion."

The IASC defines Accountability to Affected Populations (also called Accountability to Affected People) as "an active commitment to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist." More specifically, according to the IASC, it can be broken down into three types of accountability to affected people – taking account, giving account and being held to account – which are explained the figure below.

The category of "being held to account" is worth emphasizing as it includes Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). "Sexual exploitation and abuse by anyone associated with the provision of aid constitutes the most serious breach of accountability, and populations should be able to raise complaints and call for appropriate protection measures against such abuse, as well as be informed of the results of investigations on these complaints."

Figure 1 summarises the three types of accountability according to the IASC.

Figure 1. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) adapted to Afghanistan
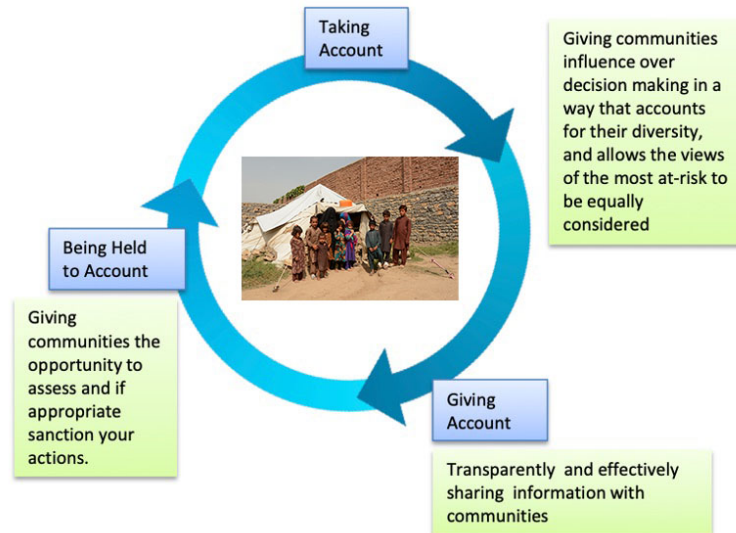
General guidance

Having a strong AAP component in your project is a <u>necessary</u> and important part of all humanitarian programming in Afghanistan. Additionally, your organisation will distinguish its AHF or other funding application if you design specific and meaningful accountability and community engagement activities for the people your project wants to assist.

Figure 2 shows the section of the AHF project proposal that asks for information on your project's AAP activities, which includes community engagement. (You likely will need more space than the two lines in the application to describe your AAP plans). AHF application reviewers will look for actionable AAP activities that fit your activity, the proposed location where the project will take place, and the communication preferences of the project's potential participants.

6. PARTICIPATION OF AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE AFFECTED POPULATION		
Accountability to Affected Persons		
Protection Mainstreaming and GBV		
GAM Reference Number		
Gender with Age Marker Code		
Code	Genders Mainstreaming Targets Everyone	Target Action Targets a defined group

The core of accountability to crisis-affected people in Afghanistan – especially those in marginalised groups – is regular two-way communication between your organisation/project staff and the project's participants as you design, implement and evaluate it.[1] Your project's participants should have an accessible and confidential way to provide feedback and complaints to your organisation on the project and staff. Similarly, your organisation should have processes for returning to people who submit feedback to give them information, answer questions and provide updates on the progress of complaints made.

Your organisation already might have AAP activities and two-way communication channels that you can integrate into your proposed project. If so, the suggestions below might help you expand or adjust them for this project proposal. If your organisation does not have AAP activities, the suggestions can help you design project-specific, meaningful AAP activities for your proposed project. Strong AAP components will include coordinating with key AAP partners, including the AAP Working Group (Co-leaders Shoaib Sharifi of BBC Media Action (shoaib.sharifi@af.bbcmediaaction.org), Angela Moore of UNHCR (moorea@unhcr.org) and OCHA AAP advisor Carolyn Davis, carolyn.davis@un.org) and Awaaz Afghanistan (https://awaazaf.org/#contact).

Suggestions for preparing to design your AAP component
- Consult with the AAP Working Group for information on AAP and two-way communication and community engagement good practices
- Consult with protection, gender, age and disability clusters, subgroups, and national NGOs to learn about the situation of marginalised people in your part of Afghanistan. Use that information to shape your project so that it can address the needs of marginalised groups your project would try to reach.
- Look for Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) surveys, perception surveys and community consultations done by NGOs, UN agencies and clusters. Awaaz Afghanistan and the REACH Initiative in Afghanistan produce reports that ask crisis-affected people for their feedback and their experiences with humanitarian organisations, programming and staff. See web addresses below.
- Look for research in Afghanistan on people's preferred communication channels for getting information from humanitarian organisations and giving information to humanitarian organisations. This research can be found at:

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[1]Discussions with communities may take place under different circumstances due to precautions to avoid COVID-19 transmission, including social distancing and wearing masks.

- *Whole of Afghanistan Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, Round II Assessment* Report, July-September 2019: https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/whole-afghanistan-multi-sector-needs-assessment-round-ii-assessment-report-july
- *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2019: Province-Level Displaced*: https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/country/afghanistan/theme/multi-sector-assessments/;
- Communities Information Access, Preferences, Needs, and Habits Assessment done by the REACH Initiative for the COVID-19 RCCE sub-group (formerly the RCCE Working Group) of the AAP Working Group,: https://afghanistan.iom.int/IOM-COVID-19-Response-RCCE;
- Awaaz Afghanistan's dashboard, updated monthly, that analyses the feedback it has received from people throughout Afghanistan who called Awaaz. It can be found at: https://awaazaf.org;
- IOM Afghanistan's Data Tracking Matrix, Community-Based Needs Assessment and other reports: https://afghanistan.iom.int/reports/displacement-tracking-matrix

- If no research has been done for the region where your project is planned, get feedback from community members and local staff on the most urgent problems they face in their lives, whether they have access to humanitarian information on programmes and services, how they like to give information to and get information from humanitarian organisations, and who in their community has the most difficulty in accessing information about humanitarian programmes and services.

Suggestions for integrating AAP activities into your project

> **TIP:** Make sure that a partnership with the Awaaz Afghanistan inter-agency complaint and feedback 410 telephone hotline (toll-free, nationwide and with male and female phone operators) is a part of your AAP plan. More information can be found later in this document on Awaaz, including its email address.

- Utilizing what you have learned about how people in Afghanistan prefer to give information to and get information from humanitarian organisations, establish two-way communication channels they can use to give feedback, make complaints and ask questions. Below are some ways to create these opportunities:
    - Hold routine community consultations/focused group discussions adhering to corona-safe precautions: fewer participants who are at least 2-meters away from each other and from the discussion facilitator at all times;
    - Conduct regular "customer satisfaction" surveys about your project that could be done through phone calls, SMS, and in-person as part of project activities and distributions;
    - Embed the Awaaz Afghanistan telephone hotline (410) into your design as one way for participants to give feedback confidentially (and anonymously, if preferred) on the project, your organisation, the conduct of your staff and other issues. Your project should have a plan for publicizing the Awaaz phone number to project participants. For more information on Awaaz, contact: AwaazAfghanistan@unops.org;
    - Appoint "Participant Representatives" or "Question-and-Answer Officers" – at least one woman and one man – for your project. These people should be publicised and made available to project participants in a way that promotes confidentiality. Remember to protect the privacy and personal information of

those who make complaints and give feedback. Document people's concerns and comments and follow-up to resolve them or respond with answers.

- When creating accountability activities and two-way communication channels, make sure you include reaching out to participants from marginalised groups such as women and girls, and disabled and older Afghans to get their suggestions on the best ways for them to give you information and to get information from you.
- Follow the important principle that humanitarian activities and programmes should never put participants at risk of harm. That also means protecting the confidentiality and personal information of people who make complaints.
- Include a way for your project/organisation to "close the loop" with participants who give feedback, file a complaint, or ask questions by returning to them with answers and updates on investigations or resolution of their complaint.
- Have an inclusion plan for selecting who will participate in your project so that people from marginalised groups (or even the more marginalised people within marginalised groups) are engaged;
- Commit to adjusting your project (and your accountability activities and mechanisms) throughout the full project cycle, including evaluation and learnings, according to feedback from participants;
- Consider designing a participatory evaluation tool so program participants can be part of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning activities and lessons;
- The terms of reference for staff working directly on your proposed project should include implementing two-way communication activities between participants and your organisation's staff and bringing people's comments to programme planners in your organisation or to other organisations as a referral if one of your project's participants has brought a problem to your attention involving another organisation;
- Commit to sharing data you collect from community consultations or surveys you do with your project participants with Awaaz Afghanistan or another agency endorsed by the AAP Working Group for response-wide analysis.
- If you don't already have one, appoint an AAP focal point within your organisation. This person should inform Awaaz of up-to-date information about your project's and organisation's activities so the call centre can share it with callers. The focal point also can contact Awaaz Afghanistan with questions about appropriate referral pathways for support.

> **TIP:** Be substantive in your accountability and community engagement activities but be realistic about what you will be able to do.

Additional guidance for specific sectors

Cash and Vouchers Assistance (CVA) projects

- In the planning phase, conduct community consultations to ask potential participants what their preferred modality of assistance is – cash, vouchers, in-kind or service delivery;
- Ensure your project has opportunities and two-way communication channels for participants to give feedback and make complaints (see examples in "General guidance" section);
- Ask people during community consultations who in their community might be more vulnerable in any aspect of CVA;
- Research protection risks in your CVA project, including the sources of risks as well as community-based or self-protection ways to reduce or avoid those risks;
- Verify that women and men both have access to mobile phones, bank accounts and identification cards as necessary. Ensure all participants have the ability to reach registration sites, cash distribution sites and markets;
- Consult with protection specialists and the Protection Cluster in Afghanistan to identify risks in the particular region or district where you want your project to operate. Risks can include whether there is a risk of taxation;
- Integrate consistent communication with communities and community leaders in all project phases to ensure CVA is not increasing risks, including of physical violence;
- In all project planning, design and evaluation, consider the role that gender dynamics play within families and what risks and consequences could flow from utilizing cash or vouchers. Evidence globally suggests that tensions and gender-based violence can rise if women participants are perceived as more economically independent. This could be a particular issue in Afghanistan;
- Include training for financial service providers in your project so they understand what AAP is and what their obligations are, including transparent and accurate explanations of the "cash-out" process in simple language – and in Pashto, Dari and in an audio or video format for those who cannot read;
- Financial service providers' performance and conduct should be part of your project's Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) procedure;
- Before designing your project, talk with Awaaz to confirm a referral pathway for complaints about your project or organisation to be sent from Awaaz to you;
- Include regular awareness-raising for programme participants that they have a right to report abuse of power, including being told they must pay someone money to get their cash assistance;
- Design a communication channel (in-person, phone, etc.) or activities to regularly ask women and older girls whether they have access to cash and/or vouchers and have a say in how the money is spent in their household;
- Create data protection protocols, especially if your project is working with the private sector for cash delivery. Protections should be especially strong if gender-based violence survivors or people at risk of GBV might participate in your project.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

- If there isn't one already, use this proposed project to institute a policy of zero tolerance for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by your organisation's staff;
- As part of your project design, conduct community consultations with communities where you want your project to operate and ask people – particularly women and girls – what communication channel they would be most comfortable using to report incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse;
- Before designing your project, hold community consultations to check whether your approach matches people's circumstances and needs. Hold men-only discussion groups and women-only discussion groups to create a safe space;
- In all phases of your project, integrate awareness-raising of the conduct your project participants should expect from your organisation's and implementing partners' staff, as well as the commitments humanitarian organisations have made on the conduct of people working for them;
- Make sure your project has PSEA awareness-raising activities that are relevant to different age groups, desired languages and literacy skills;
- Require all of your organisation's employees to sign a code of conduct that they will not sexually exploit and abuse participants in any of your organisation's programming, and specifically in your proposed project;
- Train all of your staff in what PSEA is, what conduct is expected of them, and the obligation to report SEA and SEA allegations should be a part of your project;
- Include repeated awareness-raising among programme participants of what behaviour they have a right to expect from humanitarian assistance providers as well as their right to report incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse;
- Require your organisation to respond to accusations of SEA against your staff and referring such complaints to appropriate authorities. Have a process for doing that;
- Make sure all awareness-raising materials are available in all preferred language and in an audio format for those who cannot read;
- Make sure women are part of your project staff. This promotes gender balance and provides a more comfortable way for women participants to report SEA;
- Include the definitions of AAP and PSEA in all of your project's recruitment, staff inductions, trainings and performance management, partnership agreements and reporting mechanisms.

COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

The AHF has a separate guidance note, written by the COVID-19 RCCE group in Afghanistan, for organisations seeking AHF funding for coronavirus risk communication and community engagement projects. For information on it or other COVID-19 RCCE group activities, contact: Stephen Catling at catlings@who.int or Rachel Maher at maherr@who.int.

Contact OCHA AAP Advisor/AAP Working Group Coordinator Carolyn Davis at carolyn.davis@un.org if you have questions on this document.

Resources

Accountability to affected populations: the operational framework (IASC)

https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/AAP%20Operational%20Framework%20Final%20Revision.pdf

Assessing Information and Communication Needs: A Quick and Easy Guide for Those Working in Humanitarian Response

Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network (CDAC)

http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20140721173332-ihw5g

Cash Delivery Mechanism Assessment Tool

UNHCR

https://www.unhcr.org/598c69db7.pdf

Community Engagement and Accountability

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

https://communityengagementhub.org/guides-and-tools/cea-guide/

Guidance Note: Accountability to Affected Populations

FAO

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/emergencies/docs/Guidance%20Note_Accountability_Publi.pdf

Participatory Video and the Most Significant Change

BetterEvaluation

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/toolkit/participatory_video_MSC

Training and Tools

Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network (CDAC)

http://www.cdacnetwork.org/training-and-tools/

UNHCR Emergency Handbook: Accountability to Affected People (AAP)

https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/42554/accountability-to-affected-people-aap