

Enhancing Accountability to Affected Populations through the World Humanitarian Summit

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Contribution from the IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

The consultation process leading to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 provides an important opportunity to hear the views of people and communities affected by humanitarian crises. Their voices should serve as a principle driver for discussions under each of the four themes of the Summit.

Accountability to affected populations (AAP) is an active commitment to take account of, give account to, and be held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist. It highlights the rights, dignity and safety of all segments of an affected community, identifying the capacities, aspirations and unique needs of different gender, age, and diversity groups as they evolve over time.. AAP employs key pillars to improve the quality of humanitarian service delivery for each identified group through every phase of the humanitarian response cycle, including information and two-way communication, participation and representation, and complaints and feedback. Identifying and addressing instances of sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers is a key concern in these efforts.

National governments are first and foremost accountable to their citizens and persons that seek international protection, but local and international humanitarian organizations are equally concerned about ensuring their efforts are responsive to the capacities, aspirations and needs of populations requiring their humanitarian assistance. Often times, however, organizations are “too busy responding” and do not adequately take into account the views and feedback from populations they are assisting. This can lead to competing mechanisms, an inefficient use of resources and persistent gaps in identifying and addressing needs.

In 2011, the IASC Principals endorsed five commitments to AAP, namely:

- **Leadership/Governance:** ensuring feedback and accountability mechanisms are integrated at all stages of programming and highlighted in reporting.
- **Transparency:** the provision of accessible and timely information to affected populations to ensure that they can make informed decisions and choices, and facilitate a dialogue between service providers and the population they serve.
- **Feedback and complaints:** to improve policy and practice in programming, ensuring that feedback and complaints mechanisms are streamlined, appropriate and robust.
- **Participation:** To engage with affected populations appropriately and ensure in particular that the most marginalised and affected are represented and have influence.
- **Design, monitoring and evaluation:** with the involvement of affected populations, and reporting on the results.

There are a multiplicity of standards and examples of good practice on improving AAP, but these are often undertaken at the individual agency level. What is often lacking is the ability to join up efforts and ensure that feedback from affected populations informs the way programmes are developed and implemented, and the type of assistance being delivered.

As part of the WHS consultations process, facilitating the engagement of affected populations can serve as a means to advance and amplify these efforts to improve the accountability of the humanitarian system to those it serves. This is based on the principles outlined above, which could also be endorsed as one of the outcomes of the Summit.

Means to engage with affected people and communities in the WHS process include:

- Facilitating the direct participation of representatives of groups, including key segments of communities, such as women, youth, aged and other groups to ensure diverse engagement. Provisions should be made to ensure that representatives of affected communities are able to participate in the Summit itself.
- Proactive information sharing on the WHS and topics for discussion at regional consultations and continued engagement of affected communities in those regions where consultations have already taken place. Documentation in preparation for and derived from regional consultations as well as more generally for the WHS should be made available in appropriate languages and widely circulated (posted on bulletin boards, etc.) to affected communities.
- Information on the WHS and regional consultations should be broadcast via television and radio, as appropriate and feasible, in countries where there are communities affected by humanitarian crises.
- A means of feedback, beyond the web-based system already established, should be developed to allow for communications from communities where access to the internet may not be possible. This includes through mail, via sms and mobile phones, etc.
- Priority should be given to facilitating a dialogue with affected communities prior to regional consultations and making arrangements to ensure that feedback is channelled into the consultations and at the WHS itself. The coordination capacity of the IASC Task Team on AAP/PSEA can be utilized for this purpose, drawing on the ongoing work of its membership to engage with affected communities.