

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

PRINCIPALS BI-ANNUAL MEETING

Background Note: Collective Accountability to Affected People

Prepared by the IASC secretariat

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An accountable humanitarian response, where decision-making power and resources are in the hands of those affected, is central to making the response more humane, dignified, relevant and effective. Accountability is key to realigning the asymmetry of power that currently defines the relationship between humanitarian agencies and affected populations and local actors.

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) has been part of the reform agenda for the last three decades. However, there is still a lack of clear consensus over what this accountability looks like in practice, and despite the multilateral and agency-specific commitments, and the multitude of guidance, tools, approaches and initiatives, humanitarian organisations continue to not listen to people affected by crises. As highlighted in the recent Grand Bargain review, AAP largely remains “on aid providers’ terms” and prioritises what agencies think people need, not what they say they need.

Right now, individual agencies, and the sector as a whole, has done a lot but is still more preoccupied with ‘doing AAP’ to people, as a technical fix to improve our own projects and outputs, rather than ‘being accountable’ and partnering with people by empowering local actors and sharing resources to deliver together on outcomes. As a result, many humanitarians fear that AAP risks becoming a tick-the-box exercise rather than a truly transformative way to change the current system and put people’s ideas, not ours, first.

At country-level, efforts to implement more predictable and systematic collective AAP that enable community-led responses remain **sporadic, inconsistent and largely uncoordinated**. Within the UN system, 32% of Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) have a collective AAP Framework in place, and 40% have a working group or coordination mechanism.

Blockages:

The main blockages to implement collective AAP are:

1. **Lack of buy-in at the leadership level:** Very often, AAP is driven by specialists within organisations placed far below high-level decision making. While the responsibility to ultimately deliver on AAP falls on RC/HCs, they are often not supported enough by HCTs. Importantly, there are limited incentives for the system and no consequences when the system does not respond or engage with affected populations.
2. **Failure to fully involve local actors in all phases of the response:** The current humanitarian architecture is not inclusive and adaptive enough, and it doesn’t build on existing coordination structures, from national to municipal level, that enable and strengthen local leadership.
3. **Lack of predictable quality funding:** Despite their transformational potential and urgency, collective AAP approaches struggle to secure predictable, multi-year, flexible funding across the humanitarian programme cycle. This is required for programmes to adapt to feedback, to allow for

more iteration and learning, to have more time to build the trust required with communities to gain access and proximity, and, fundamentally, to try to fix the inherent power asymmetry that exists today between humanitarians and local populations and actors.

4. **Lack of evidence of the impact:** The lack of evidence demonstrating the direct correlation between collective AAP and the effectiveness of the humanitarian response seems to place collective AAP as an ‘optional’ element, as a ‘nice to have’ for humanitarian leaders, but not as the cornerstone of principled humanitarian action.

Proposed Action/Decision(s):

There are six main areas for consideration by the IASC Principals:

IASC Principals to commit to making collective AAP a priority by:

- a. Issuing a statement on the centrality of collective AAP to principled humanitarian action.
- b. Increasing advocacy within IASC member organizations, and subsequently to their respective country representatives in HCTs, on the importance of delivering on collective AAP.
- c. Advocating with donors to provide multi-year funding to support capacities and collective AAP efforts on the ground (including engaging affected people in every aspect of the humanitarian programme cycle; strengthening community feedback mechanisms; regularly capturing the perceptions of affected people to better inform the response and course correctors).
- d. Report annually to the IASC Principals on the perceptions of affected people to inform stepped-up effort and work to strengthen the system’s accountability to affected people.

[Note: with thanks to the efforts of the IASC’s Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion (co-Chaired by UNHCR and UNICEF), the IASC is in the process of finalizing critical tools to support the field to deliver more coherently on system-wide AAP (including with the IASC’s AAP Framework and the Results Tracker which are currently being piloted in a number of countries). Similarly, with thanks to the sub-group on collective AAP co-Chaired by WFP and IFRC, the IASC is working on a proposal to strengthen collective AAP efforts on the ground.]