

Accountability to affected people



**A REVIEW OF APPROACHES AND PRACTICES IN THE SWISS
SOLIDARITY FUNDED RESPONSE TO THE NEPAL EARTHQUAKE**

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HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH INITIATIVES

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Executive Summary

Much progress has been made in recent years by humanitarian and development agencies to strengthen their accountability to those in need of assistance. Despite this, there continues to be widespread acknowledgement that the provision of information to communities, their participation in decision-making and recourse for them to make complaints and receive redress continues to be a challenge for NGO performance.

This review analyses the approaches used by the ten Swiss agencies currently implementing projects in Nepal with Swiss Solidarity (collected) funds to enhance accountability to affected people (AAP) in their programmes. Importantly, it seeks to gain the perceptions of affected people and their preferences for information dissemination and communication.

The scope and Methodology of the review

Consultations were undertaken with Swiss Solidarity's partners, their field staff and their local partners to explore their Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) commitments, the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches they used, the challenges they faced and emerging good practice. The review focused on the key commitments to information sharing, ensuring engagement in decision making, listening to communities and complaints handling. The responsiveness of organisations to community feedback, and the barriers to this were reviewed. Consultations with affected communities were undertaken in four field locations, the purpose of which were to understand the views and preferences of different groups within each community.

A mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches were used, with an emphasis being placed on qualitative and participatory tools in order to capture the perceptions of communities and agencies' staff. Individual interviews and groups discussions were conducted with 42 senior staff and 21

local field staff; 24 staff members completed the online survey; 112 men and women participated in community focus group discussions (FGD), and; 21 community members participated in individual interviews. Key informant interviews (KII) were carried out with 21 government officials and community leaders. Two learning and experience-sharing workshops were facilitated by the review team in Kathmandu, in which over 42 staff members participated.

One of the most significant advances in strengthening humanitarian accountability has been the publication and dissemination of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). The CHS, provides a comprehensive way to view accountability and places AAP at its centre. The commitments link issues of accountability to performance and helps to ensure that the results of actions are relevant and appropriate for the people they are intended to assist. The review uses relevant commitments relating to AAP from the CHS as benchmarks.

Organisational commitments to AAP

While significant effort was made by organisations to strengthen their means of communicating directly with communities, there was a tendency at times for AAP to focus on tools such as complaints response mechanisms (CRM). These alone are insufficient to make programmes accountable to beneficiaries. The reliance on CRMs suggests there is still scope to strengthen the understanding of agency staff about the breadth of accountabilities, which go far beyond the ability or otherwise of communities to provide feedback or raise complaints. A shift in mind-set is required by organisations if AAP approaches are to avoid becoming too mechanistic. It was felt that a greater awareness of the AAP commitments, as articulated in the CHS would help organisations to place approaches within a more comprehensive AAP framework.

This would allow the range of AAP tools to be used more effectively and appropriately, and for organisations to focus better on all aspects of AAP.

There is significant scope for AAP to be better-resourced, with dedicated staff and funding. Responsibilities in agencies' and accountability processes could also be clearer. There is a need for organisations to make a commitment to systematically asking communities their preferences for how they are engaged and for these preferences to be monitored and to provide the basis for AAP. Ultimately, for AAP approaches to be effective, they must be based on a sound understanding of who uses them and the levels of satisfaction that exist.

Approaches for information dissemination

Information and communication are important forms of aid as they allow people to gain access to assistance, to participate in decision-making to improve its relevance, and to hold organisations to account for the quality of the assistance they provide. A wide range of approaches to information dissemination in the field were observed which varied significantly between projects according to the type of assistance and the target group. Some organisations were found to use a wide range of different approaches within each project and location, while others focused on a much smaller menu of options. It was felt that tools needed to be better adapted to target groups, and particularly to the preferences of women. The important role that field staff played in the provision of information was commendable. A detailed analysis of the 16 main tools used to disseminate information at the community level, is available in the annex at the end of this report.

A times, there appeared to be a disconnect between the information that was provided, and peoples understanding of it, which suggests that this needs to be more carefully monitored in future. Different groups within the community expressed preferences in how they received information; overall a preference was expressed for receiving information face-to-face during door-to-door visits where people felt able to discuss issues and raise questions, or in meetings with staff. It was felt that greater use could be made of local media and journalists, and a better understanding should be gained of people's preferences for styles and timings of radio shows, and TV programmes. Organisations could improve their monitoring of groups that are receiving information, in order to identify those that are being left out, so as to strengthen their approaches. There is a need for more strategic AAP information to be shared, such as the role of feedback and com-

plaints in improving project quality, and the rights of community members in relation to AAP.

Engagement in decision-making

The research showed that community members were regularly involved in deciding priorities, activities and the selection of beneficiaries at the initial stages of projects. This was usually achieved through community meetings, and through the provision of support to existing or establishment of new committees and user groups. The role of radio programmes and field staff were considered to be important in promoting community participation in activities and sharing of opportunities for community members to be involved. Organisations should ensure the inclusive representation and participation of affected people in decisions that affect them and the views of different groups in the community should guide the design and implementation of projects.

The greatest levels of participation were observed when there was a clear benefit for those involved, when projects were targeted to specific groups, and when the group was well established and included both men and women. Participants were felt to play a stronger role in decision making when they had greater control over aspects of the project such as budgets, the selection of activities and their management. The level of participant involvement in decision-making varied considerably between projects, with participants or some projects being involved in substantive decisions around implementation, while the role of others was limited to informing decisions about timing and the location of activities. It was felt that in general, more decision-making responsibility could be passed to project participants and committee members, with the caveat that this would require careful monitoring of how representative these groups were of the community as a whole.

Particular attention should be paid to approaches to actively facilitate the involvement of marginalised groups, individuals traditionally excluded from power or decision making and their leaders, and women. People should be consulted on how they would like to participate in decision making and groups asked who they would like to represent them, during the assessment and planning stages of projects.

Listening to affected people

When people have the opportunity to voice their opinions, this enhances their sense of well-being; it helps them adapt to the challenges they face and enables them to take an active role in their own recovery. Specific feedback on the level of satisfaction with activities and suggestions for

improvement plays an important role in improving quality and effectiveness of projects. Listening carefully to people improves the quality of response and contributes to more effective programmes.

A mix of informal and formal mechanisms were used by organisations to gather feedback, both at specific times and throughout the duration of projects. Some approaches required community members to react to problems or concerns that they encounter by contacting organisations in writing, via the phone or by meeting with staff. For these type of approaches, access for all members of the community, and particularly for marginalised groups and women was a challenge. Some reactive approaches such as suggestion boxes and phone calls permitted feedback to be provided at any time as well as allowing for a swift response to concerns raised.

Proactive approaches of eliciting feedback are used less frequently, but nonetheless, provide an important means of engaging with communities and monitoring levels of satisfaction. Ongoing satisfaction surveys and weekly or monthly visits by project staff offer communities a regular opportunity to discuss project progress and permit the collection and analysis of trends. Constant feedback throughout the project, and feedback provided verbally created a challenge to organisations, because of difficulties in ensuring that feedback is systematically recorded and addressed by management decision making processes. Organisations were observed to put significant effort into obtaining feedback from community members directly through their field staff; both during visits and meetings. They used various approaches to ensure they recruited the right staff and placed them in communities to facilitate this.

Organisations considered that it was more challenging to elicit negative feedback from affected people, and proactive approaches were frequently used to encourage this. It was felt that greater efforts to explain the positive role that feedback plays in improving programming, might help to overcome some of the cultural constraints. Feedback from community members on the levels of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of projects was encouraged and collected during surveys.

Community members should routinely be asked how they prefer to communicate with and give feedback to organisations, and these issues should be explored in the assessment stage of a programme. Approaches should be designed to routinely consult women and marginalised groups separately from other community members. The

role of radio, television and social media could be developed to include greater two-way communication, discussions about satisfaction-levels and means of improving agency activities.

Stronger processes and clearer staff responsibilities are needed to ensure that feedback about satisfaction levels, particularly feedback provided verbally, are analysed to ensure trends are identified and fed into processes that support changes and remedial actions to be made. Staff should be encouraged to routinely share this feedback in meetings and organisations must ensure they have processes in place to systematically report this to decision makers and senior managers.

Approaches used in the handling of complaints

Affected people have the right to complain to an organisation and to receive an appropriate and timely response. A complaints mechanism and a system for providing resolution are key components of any AAP approach. Complaints allow organisations to address specific problems with the assistance that they are providing, deal with grievances against staff, or address serious misconduct. Complaints systems can help organisations to recognise and respond to serious issues and improve the quality of their programmes.

Partners were each able to articulate clear processes for the handling of complaints and some also shared their written procedures. Included in these were details of the process for receiving and recording complaints, specific staff responsibilities for addressing the issues raised and a time-frame for resolving the concerns. A number of organisations, but not all, had databases which categorised feedback and complaints according to their nature and severity, which aided analysis and disaggregation of complaints. The forums for making complaints that affected people said they used most frequently were meetings, or through direct contact with staff members (e.g. via the Social Mobiliser), through user groups and committees, and via mobile phone. Raising complaints directly with staff was generally considered to be preferable as resolution was often immediate and it also provided greater confidence that the complaint had been received.

User groups and committees were also considered to be an effective way of obtaining swift redress. Interviews revealed that men were more willing to make complaints than women, a finding that was supported by the analysis of organisation's feedback databases. This suggests that more needs to be done to encourage women to feed complaints back to organisations, and for

stronger approaches to be developed to capture women's complaints. There is a need to inform affected people of their right to complain as well as making them aware of the positive role that complaints can play in improving project quality and addressing issues of concern. All organisations should ensure they use an effective system to record complaints in order to resolve problems and analyse trends. Processes must be in place to ensure that the findings from complaints analysis are systematically fed into management decision-making processes.

Organisations must ensure adequate attention is given to systematically include analysis of complaints in project decision-making. The use of different approaches by the different groups in communities should be monitored in order to gain an understanding of how they are used. Approaches that are rarely used could be replaced with those that are considered to be more effective; communities own views of the utility of different approaches should inform such decisions.

Responding to feedback

Feedback should be responded to in a timely way, any complaints should be resolved and the outcomes should be fed back to the complainants. This is necessary both to address specific problems, and to improve programme quality more broadly. There is a need for flexibility to adapt projects to accommodate changing needs and shifting contexts, and for organisations to learn from the feedback they receive.

There were many examples given to the research team of minor changes or modifications that were made to projects. It was difficult to find examples of more substantive changes that had been made as a result of community feedback. There were a significant number of complaints on specific issues such as beneficiary targeting; this may indicate a need for more substantive changes to targeting approaches and policies that were not being adequately addressed.

The long chain of staff that were frequently required to make a change to a project was said to have restricted responsiveness and to have led to delays. This chain often extended from the field staff who received the feedback, to the manager of the local partner, to the partner executive staff, to the international NGO district-level manager, and then on occasions, to the international NGO office in Kathmandu. The length of the chain depended on the scope of the changes that were being proposed. This decision-making process could be rationalised if greater responsibility was placed closer to the field.

Staff reported that it was more difficult to adapt and change activities that had been agreed in consultation with communities and other stakeholders at the design stage of a project. They felt that once communities had been informed about activities, and if they had been advertised, it was considered to be difficult to change them. The process of government authorisation of projects and activities also acted as deterrent to making substantive changes once activities had been officially agreed. There was a reluctance to make changes once a project had been given the green light by the government.

The review found that organisations' responsiveness can be limited by a lack of procedural flexibility and agility, by time-consuming internal processes, by limitations in financial and human resources, and by a lack (or perceived lack) of donor flexibility. It is important for organisations to analyse the blockages and to understand the limits to their responsiveness to feedback as well as what flexibility exists. It is also important for donors and managers to inform staff when changes can be made and the ease with which different types of changes can be made.

Recommendations for Swiss Solidarity's partners in Nepal

The recommendations below provide guidance on how AAP approaches can be strengthened by SwS-funded partners in Nepal and are the priorities from those presented at the end of each section of this report:

1. The importance of adopting a holistic approach to being accountable to affected populations

There is a need for a fundamental shift in the way in which some organisations view AAP; it is important that an overly reductive, or mechanistic approach is not taken. Rather, agencies should incorporate all aspects of the CHS commitments related to AAP. This will require greater emphasis being placed on training and capacity building which will require access to dedicated funding and staffing of AAP.

2. The need to engage with all members of a community

For organisations to be truly accountable they must engage with all groups within a community and ensure that AAP approaches are tailored to their preferences. They should work specifically to overcome cultural constraints, such as the reluctance to provide negative feedback. The inclusiveness of user groups is an area which requires continuing attention in order to ensure that women, marginalised groups and the most vulnerable are consulted.

3. The necessity of adopting a systematic approach to addressing feedback and concerns

The processes that organisations have in place to ensure that feedback is systematically considered in project design and implementation must be strengthened and the barriers that exist need to be better understood and addressed, to the extent possible. The research found that while organisations are responsive to community

feedback, there is a tendency to focus on minor modifications rather than substantive changes to projects.

4. The importance for investing in local partnerships to strengthen AAP

It is important for SwS-funded agencies to invest in their local partners' AAP capacity; their knowledge of and ability to systematically gather, analyse and respond to community views should be supported and strengthened.

5. The need to strengthen AAP training

All M&E staff, SM and project staff and managers should be trained in AAP and the relevant CHS commitments; a training programme should be put in place to orientate existing and all new staff.

Recommendations for Swiss Solidarity

SwS can play an important role in championing AAP in its responses and can facilitate reflection and collective learning by sponsoring targeted research as they have done in Nepal. There are opportunities to achieve this both in current and future programmes in Nepal, and within future humanitarian contexts. In order to achieve these transformational changes, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Foster a culture of AAP in how SwS works with its partners

Organisations' AAP practice should be based on a thorough understanding of relevant CHS commitments and this should be clearly articulated by SwS partners at a strategic and operational level. SwS should ensure partners have access to the latest training material in the field, and where appropriate consider funding, and supporting in country training and capacity building within partners proposals. Specifically, they should develop a set of minimum standards for AAP, based on the CHS. SwS should require that partners identify AAP costs, activities and staff responsible as part of proposals.

2. Champion the flexibility required to modify programmes in response to community feedback

SwS should seek to position itself among its peer donors as an AAP champion and role model the flexibility that is required for organisations to be responsive to community feedback. In support of this, it should proactively engage partners in discussions about the importance and options of adapting projects based on beneficiary feedback throughout the project cycle and work closely with them to strengthen their capacity in AAP. SwS should ensure they possess the flexibility required for organisations to easily and swiftly adapt projects to meet changing needs.

3. Continue to promote learning and practical action on AAP in Nepal

SwS has initiated a process of reflection and learning on AAP in Nepal which provides an important foundation for further work in the future. The recommendations for SwS partners outlined in the report should be promoted with additional funding made available in order to continue to strengthen performance and learning. There is an opportunity for SwS to continue to support sharing learning between partners and a follow up workshop should be facilitated to discuss priorities. As new proposals are developed it should be mandatory for partners to explain how they will implement lessons learned from this review.

Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to affected populations
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability & Performance of NGOs
CHF	Swiss Francs
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CPAC	Central Project Advisory Committee
CRM	Complaints Response Mechanism
FCHW	Female Community Health Workers
LLA	Listen Learn Act
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ReaL	Recovery of Agricultural Livelihoods
SM	Social mobiliser
SOHS	State of the Humanitarian System
SwS	Swiss Solidarity
VDC	Village Development Committee

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Section 1

Introduction and methodology

This section introduces the objectives and key questions for the review. It presents a summary of the approaches and methodology used, the criteria for selection of partners for detailed review, and a discussion of the main challenges and limitations of the review.

1.1 Introduction

The earthquake which struck Nepal on the 25th April 2015, killed nearly 9,000 people and injured a further 200,000. It made many hundreds of thousands of people homeless and flattened entire villages. A succession of aftershocks compounded the disaster, causing further loss of life and triggering avalanches and landslides.

Following the disaster, more than 28 million Swiss Francs (CHF) was raised and has since been distributed or committed by Swiss Solidarity (SwS) to its partner organisations. To date, these have funded a total of 31 projects. As part of their strategic engagement with SwS, its partner organisations agreed that a review which focused on their approaches to Accountability to Affected People (AAP) should be conducted, with a view to facilitating learning and sharing experience.

1.2 The importance of AAP in humanitarian action

Despite progress being made to strengthen the accountability of humanitarian agencies to those in need of assistance, successive iterations of ALNAP's *State of the Humanitarian System*¹, and numerous studies of community perceptions of humanitarian assistance suggest there is still much work to be done to ensure that people affected by crises are routinely informed, have a say in, and can make decisions about the assistance that is provided to them (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1

Findings on accountability from the Listen Learn Act Project (LLA)

The Listen Learn Act (LLA) project was funded by the European Union Humanitarian Aid and led by DanChurch Aid, Ground Truth Solutions and Save the Children Denmark². It aimed to explore a methodology to strengthen accountability to communities affected by crises as a tool to measure and improve compliance with the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS). The project was implemented by four international NGOs and their partners and was piloted in four countries. A key output from the project was to learn about agencies' accountability; the findings from this show that across all of the agencies and all of the country case studies, it was questions that related to agency performance against the AAP commitments that most frequently received the lowest scores from communities³.

Self-assessments of agency compliance with the CHS in 2016⁴ reveal variability in the extent to which humanitarian organisations fulfil the nine commitments. The commitment with the lowest average score is Commitment 5 which calls for communities and people affected by crisis to have access to safe and responsive complaint mechanisms. As a consequence of this patchy performance, there is widespread acknowledgement that the provision of information to communities, their participation in decision-making

¹ ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System reports are available at <http://sohs.alnap.org/#introduction>.

² For more information about the LLA project, see <https://www.danchurchaid.org/how-we-work/quality-assurance/listen-learn-act-project>.

³ Featherstone, A (2017) Placing accountability at the heart of humanitarian assistance:

Lessons from the Listen Learn Act Project. DanChurch Aid, Ground Truth Solutions and Save the Children.

⁴ www.corehumanitarianstandard.org

and recourse for them to make complaints and receive redress continue to be a challenge for NGO performance.

References to AAP in the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS)

One of the most significant advances in strengthening humanitarian accountability has been the publication and dissemination of the CHS⁵. The CHS, provides a comprehensive way to view accountability and places AAP at its centre. The commitments link issues of accountability to performance, and helps to ensure that the results of actions are relevant and appropriate for the people they are intended to assist. Commitments one, three, four and five provide a clear blue print for strong and effective AAP, as detailed in figure 2.

Figure 2, CHS commitments that are relevant to AAP

CHS Commitment 1: Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate and relevant to their needs.

- 1.3: Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context.

CHS Commitment 3: Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected as a result of humanitarian action.

- 3.6: Identify and timely action upon negative/unintended effects.

CHS Commitment 4: Communities know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them

- 4.1: Provide information to communities and people affected by crisis about the organisation, the principles it adheres to, how it expects its staff to behave, the programmes it is implementing and what they intend to deliver.
- 4.2: Communicate in languages, formats and media that are easily understood, respectful and culturally appropriate for different members of the community, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- 4.3: Ensure inclusive representation and participation in decisions that affect them.
- 4.4: Encourage and facilitate communities and people affected by crisis to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the assistance received,

paying particular attention to the gender, age and diversity of those giving feedback.

CHS Commitment 5: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

- 5.1: Consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes.
- 5.2: Welcome and accept complaints, and communicate how the mechanism can be accessed and the scope of issues it can address.
- 5.3: Manage complaints in a timely, fair and appropriate manner that prioritizes the safety of the complainant and those affected at all stages.

The CHS provides a holistic way of viewing accountability which has been lacking in the sector and provides an important link between issues of accountability and performance – ensuring that humanitarian actions are relevant and appropriate for the people they are intended to assist. By placing affected people at the centre, the CHS moves definitions of effectiveness, efficiency and value for money away from donors and implementing agencies and places them in the hands of those who receive the assistance. This logic underpins each of the nine commitments of the CHS and in so doing, has revolutionized how the sector thinks about the design, implementation, management and evaluation of aid programmes. The review uses the commitments relating to AAP from the CHS as a benchmark.

1.3 The purpose and objectives of the review

During the drafting of the terms of reference for the review, it was agreed that it would focus on facilitating learning between partners and would seek to identify examples of good practice, analysing the strengths and weaknesses of AAP approaches and documenting the challenges that agencies have faced. In order to strengthen AAP practice, it was proposed that a set of recommendation would be developed which focused on improving partner practice in Nepal and globally.

⁵ The latest version of the Sphere handbook will incorporate the CHS details and resources are available at www.chsalliance.org/resources

Objectives of the review

- Objective 1: To analyse the AAP approaches and tools used by partners;
- Objective 2: To identify the successes and weaknesses in approaches, and to review effectiveness in enhancing AAP, using the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) as a benchmark;
- Objective 3: To facilitate learning, sharing of experiences between partners and to propose recommendations and tools to improve AAP.

Key Questions

- What approaches are used to share information with affected people?
- What are the approaches to ensure the participation and engagement of affected people in decision making?
- What approaches are used to listen to affected people?
- What are the approaches for complaints handling from affected people?
- How responsive are partners to feedback from affected people?

1.4 Summary of the methodology

A mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches were used, with a focus placed on qualitative and participatory tools in order to capture the perceptions of communities and agencies' staff. Individual interviews, groups consultations and focus group discussions (FGD) were carried out, with NGO staff and communities. Learning workshops between SwS-funded organisations and their

partners were facilitated in Kathmandu, at the start and end of the review. These workshops were designed both to inform the review and facilitate the sharing AAP experiences between partners. An online survey was undertaken with partners to provide some quantitative information, and to contribute to an initial overview of organisations approaches.

Each of the ten international SwS partners working in Nepal participated in the study, from which four were selected for more detailed consultation in the field, and to facilitate the community consultations with project participants. These four partners were selected for detailed review based on criteria which included;

- the type of project activities they were engaged, to allow a range of activities to be studied;
- the nature of their partnership with SwS, to allow greatest impact,
- the scale of their earthquake response activities, and;
- the accessibility of their project locations to the review team within the period of the field work.

The partners engaged in the research selected a range of projects which were representative of the different sectors of their work, as figure 3 shows. These projects were the main focus of the field work, although there was some discussion of other projects, where staff, locations and projects overlapped. This included projects implemented through commercial contractors, well-established strategic partnerships, and new partners.

Figure 3, Partners and projects selected for detailed review

PARTNER	PROJECT SUMMARY	FIELD LOCATION
Swiss Contact	Skills for Safer Reconstruction: The project was conducting mason training and providing information on safe reconstruction mostly through door to door campaigns and a television program	Jhangajholi, Sindhuli
Handicap International (Swiss Branch)	Cash for Work: This project aimed at providing with short-term employment opportunities after the Earthquakes through multi-purpose cash grants Multi-purpose cash grants: assisting restoration of livelihoods (agriculture, livestock and business) lost due to the earthquake	Dolalghat, Kavreplanchowk
Save the Children Switzerland	Early Childhood Care and Development Centre: The project intended to mitigate the impact of 2015 earthquake and build the resilience of children and primary caregivers through equitable access to quality, protective and inclusive early childhood care and development.	Chautara, Sindhupalchowk
Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation	Recovery of Agricultural Livelihood (ReaL): the project aims to support farmers to re-engage productively in agricultural production through its interventions in: Rehabilitation of irrigation facilities; establishment of agricultural extension services through the government and the private sector; capacity development of agricultural input suppliers; and the rehabilitation of water mills.	Melamchi, Sindhupalchowk

The review was conducted between October and December 2017, with field work in Nepal being undertaken over a period of 19 days in November. It was undertaken in 4 phases:

Phase 1

- Preparation and inception: Literature review of project documents, methodology and survey design, development of tools, Geneva SwS visit, the Inception report, Field planning and initial logistics, online survey with all partners.

Phase 2

- Field work: In country planning, travel to Nepal, consultations with IO Partners in Kathmandu, initial Learning and Kick off work shop. Field work for 19 days which included a detailed review of four partners AAP approaches, stakeholder interviews and community consultations with project participants.

Phase 3

- Analysis and presentation: Analysis and drafting of findings, final partner Learning workshop in Kathmandu, presentation of findings in Geneva SwS and drafting of report for comment.

Phase 4

- Reporting and dissemination: Final report writing, consultation and dissemination of findings.

During the research, a total of 215 consultations were held:

- Partner interviews were conducted in Kathmandu and field locations with 42 senior managers, project managers, coordinators,

monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialists and field staff. Interviews were conducted with 21 local partners staff including Executive staff, managers, M&E, coordinators and field staff;

- Community consultations and FGD were conducted with 112 women and men. A further 21 community members were interviewed which included representatives, teachers and other key informants;

- Key stakeholder interviews were conducted with 19 government officials, peoples' elected representatives, teachers and media staff.

In addition to the consultations, an online survey was prepared by the research team and was completed by 24 partner staff from IO international and 4 local organisations. 42 staff attended and contributed to two learning workshops. During the workshops, staff were asked to present their experiences of AAP, and the strengths and challenges of their approaches. Interviews were also conducted with the head of SwS project department and with a project officer, in Geneva.

During discussions about how best to capture the strengths and weaknesses of agency approaches to AAP, it was agreed not to compare organisations with each other. In order to encourage openness and protect confidentiality, it was also considered beneficial to anonymise many of the findings, with the exception of good practice examples.

Figure 4, A focus group discussion conducted by the research team with a group of mothers



Community consultations included participatory exercises which were undertaken to facilitate discussion on key areas of the review to obtain views of different members of the group. The picture above shows women documenting ways in which they received information about the project they were participating in, and using smiley face stickers to indicate the different ways in which the implementing agency provided them with information and their preferred way of receiving it.

1.5 Limitations and methodological challenges

There were a number of limitations and methodological challenges that affected the research:

- The timing of the study, two and a half years after the earthquake, gave a snap shot in time of organisations approaches to AAP. It was found to be difficult for staff to speak about AAP approaches used immediately after the earthquake, due to staff turnover. Support to AAP may have been greater initially after the earthquake.
- It was not possible to visit and examine all project types and some agency staff expressed an interest in learning about AAP in public infrastructure projects, which weren't included in the research.
- The field work was directly facilitated by the SwS programme manager and International NGO partners; although this meant the team was able to undertake a considerable number of consultations and FGD over a short time period, at times it may have compromised the independence of the review team from SwS.
- Due to the limited time that was available for field work, communities were selected that were either accessible by road or within a 2-hour walk. The review team was not able to engage with more remote communities.

Several changes were made during the inception phase; a decision was made to hire a vehicle for the research team to facilitate logistics and allow greater independence from SwS partner organisations during the field work. Some changes were also made to the projects that were sampled to increase the diversity.

1.6 Structure of the report

This section introduces the research and outlines the methodology; Section 2 provides an overview and analysis of organisational commitments to enhancing AAP; Sections 3-7 of the report are structured around the 5 review questions, with each section presenting a description of the different AAP approaches used, how they were used, and an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses. An analysis of organisational and community perceptions are included in each section, along with examples of good and bad practice in green and findings from the survey in boxes in orange. Practical recommendations are made at the end of each section. In section 8, a set of country specific and global recommendations are presented for consideration by SwS.

The table in the annex I provides a detailed analysis of the main approaches used by organisations for communicating with affected people.

Section 2

Organisational commitments to AAP

SwS partner organisations have between them made a wide range of commitments to strengthening AAP in their programmes. This section seeks to document these as background to the key questions in section 3 to 7.

2.1 Introduction

Partner organisational commitments to AAP can broadly be grouped under six headings which provided a framework for analysis.

- Strategic commitment to AAP, policy and accompanying guidance;
- Resourcing AAP - financing, specialist AAP staff;
- Monitoring AAP;
- Recruitment of community-level staff and working with local committees;
- Partnerships commitments and working with local organisations;
- Engagement with host government accountability mechanisms;
- Beneficiary selection to ensure inclusion.

2.2 Strategic commitment to AAP

All organisations that participated in the research had made a strong commitment to working closely with, and empowering local communities, to providing project information and listen to community voices. This was articulated in a variety of ways through their respective mandates and principles of operation. These commitments were emphasised by senior managers during interviews and by project staff during the field work.

On some occasions, this commitment was further evidenced by organisational documents which outlined ways in which information would be shared with communities receiving assistance, encouraged beneficiaries to voice their opinions and complaints, and which described mechanisms to respond to feedback.

GOOD PRACTICE

Caritas' Switzerland commitments to AAP describe why feedback is collected, it provides a definition of what feedback is and how it can be provided, and it outlines procedures and responsibilities. It also states the importance of ensuring that beneficiaries and stakeholders are aware of their rights and entitlements and that they have access to relevant and appropriate information about projects, that enables them to participate in them and feedback on them.

Only a handful of the documents seen made explicit reference to the CHS and during interviews, several organisations questioned the relevance of the CHS to their development work and projects.

This suggests that there may be a lack of understanding of the utility of the CHS in development work, as it was developed to also be used by dual or multi-mandated organisations⁶.

⁶ The CHS and associated documents can be found on <https://www.chsalliance.org>.

"The commitments of the CHS and the related key actions reflect the key human rights principles of participation, accountability, transparency, and inclusion. As the CHS commitments promote quality and accountability they can be used by any organisation from the project and programme level up to the headquarters level"⁷

Strategic commitments to aspects of AAP were referred to in SwS proposals. These included; the willingness of organisations to adapt project activities based on continuous review and reflection of beneficiary needs; a commitment to consult with communities during project design; approaches to routinely present project plans for feedback; details of feedback systems and complaints mechanisms, and; processes for consulting communities.

FROM THE SURVEY

7 International NGOs out of 10 stated that they explicitly outlined commitments to AAP in their SwS proposal.

Conversations with staff on AAP tended to focus on the tools used or on Complaints Response Mechanisms (CRM). Although often an important part of an organisation AAP approach a CRM alone will not make a programme accountable to beneficiaries. This suggested there is still work to do with some staff to aid the understanding of the breadth of accountabilities which go far beyond the ability or otherwise of communities to provide feedback or raise complaints.

There was limited articulation seen of the roles and responsibilities of staff towards AAP or of the structures and processes in place within organisations to ensure feedback systematically informed decision making and project design. Organisational AAP guidelines tended to focus on tools and approaches for information dissemination and feedback, such as hotline numbers, information boards and feedback boxes, rather than the processes for ensuring organisations were responsive to feedback and were committed to adapting programmes based on the views of affected people.

"Systems are no substitute for trusted relationships with community members. Continue to encourage staff to informally discuss programs and issues with community members, and act on feedback they receive."⁸

It was felt that a greater awareness of the AAP commitments, as articulated in the CHS would help organisations to place approaches within a more comprehensive AAP framework. This would allow the range of AAP tools to be used more effectively and appropriately, and for organisations to focus better on all aspects of AAP.

This echoes the findings of the second LLA learning report which reports a common misunderstanding within humanitarian staff about the role of approaches such as complaints boxes, and that there is a need to clarify that these only partially address humanitarian accountability which is more fully articulated through the implementation of the nine commitments of the CHS⁹.

A shift in mind-set is required by organisations if AAP approaches are to avoid becoming too mechanistic, as expressed in the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership's (HAP) 2015 Humanitarian Accountability Report.

"Accountability is not going to be improved through more 'tweaking' with technical or procedural fixes. It requires a change in mind-set to acknowledge that each and every person affected by and engaged in humanitarian crises has different roles and responsibilities to play."¹⁰

2.3 Resourcing of AAP

It is necessary for organisations to provide dedicated staff and specific resources to AAP. To be effective AAP needs to be encouraged and prioritised at all levels of an organisation, from field to senior management and within INGOs and their partners. It is important that staff are trained and aware of all aspects of AAP and the relevant CHS commitments, at senior management levels as well as at field level. Donors can play a role in encouraging and ensuring AAP receives dedicated funding, and that this occurs in the international NGOs they fund and with their local partners.

The role of specialist AAP staff

Experienced AAP staff can champion accountability within organisations, and can assist in establishing and maintaining an understanding of AAP. There was no evidence of specific AAP champions within the organisations that participated in the review, although some staff members spoke very passionately about the importance of close links with communities and empowerment.

⁷ <https://www.chsalliance.org>.

⁸ World Vision (2009) Complaint and response mechanisms: A resource guide, Food programming and management group, World Vision International, p.7.

⁹ Featherstone, A (2017) Placing accountability at the heart of humanitarian assistance: Lessons from the Listen Learn Act Project, DanChurch Aid, Ground Truth Solutions and Save the Children.

¹⁰ Brown, D. (2015) Accountability: Everybody's responsibility, in CHS Alliance (2015) Humanitarian Accountability Report 2015: On the Road to Istanbul - how can the WHS make humanitarian response more effective, p.17.

It was unclear whether specialist staff had been involved in establishing AAP systems earlier in the earthquake response.

Evidence from the literature suggests that AAP is often strongest when there are dedicated AAP staff or champions with programmes, or responses. Research on AAP during the Philippines Typhoon Haiyan response showed the importance of champions especially at the leadership level in order to embed a culture of AAP within an organisation and ensuring the processes are in place to mainstream AAP within organisations from field to senior management level. Such staff played a crucial role in establishing an organisations AAP approach, systems and processes;

"early on to make the case for dedicated staff and funding separately from M and E and also in terms of sustained advocacy, for bringing feedback issues and trends to the attention of operational managers. One AAP manager reckoned it took 3-4 months to really embed a culture and mindset of AAP within their Haiyan Response. During this time they held training and orientation workshops for staff, and were continuously reviewing and developing processes, to ensure the right questions were being asked...and how affected people were consulted and participated in programmes, ...and refining the collation and analysis of feedback data.."

AAP was generally not led by specialist staff within organisations and was usually a function of a range of staff including; M&E teams, project managers, social mobiliser (SM) and technical staff. Provision of information for example was usually the responsibility of SM staff. Responsibility for the collection of feedback was generally shared between M&E staff, partner staff and field staff. Complaints were received at the field level, district and headquarters level. Because of the large number of staff involved in the process and the lack of clarity that often existed around responsibilities, there is a risk that without specific staff members being tasked to lead, AAP information received is not being comprehensively gathered. Without a clear process in place and with a lack of clarity about the specific responsibilities of staff, it is difficult for organisations to systematically monitor, analyse and act on feedback that they receive. To strengthen this, one organisation employed Social Safeguard Officers to closely manage the work of the SMs.

Staff capacity and awareness of AAP was also patchy with many staff having very limited awareness of CHS or AAP commitments. Several organisations reported that they needed help to build AAP capacity throughout their organisation, and particularly for orientation of new staff, as this was not current practice. No evidence was found that AAP was being routinely included in staff training, beyond its use in specific organisational tools, complaints handling mechanisms and databases.

Recruitment of local staff

The work of local partner SM staff that were often embedded local communities, was a real strength of all organisations AAP approaches. Although INGOs deliver programmes through partners as a consequence of the government policy requiring this, rather than in an effort to strengthen AAP approaches, this should be considered good practice. Organisations continuously emphasised the importance of maintaining strong relationships with community members. The role of local SM staff was considered by organisations to be crucial, and specific recruitment practices were used to ensure staff were selected who had the right language skills, gender and ethnicity, and that they were familiar with local social dynamics. Many SMs lived locally, or within communities, and were constantly on hand to provide information to communities and feedback to organisations.

Organisations felt that SM staff brought a better understanding of the local context to the organisations, and enhanced both the sharing of information and the collection of feedback. Despite the obvious benefits that local SM staff had, there were also disadvantages of having staff that were considered by communities to be 'one of us' as an interview with a female SM staff member highlighted.

"when you are local you are someone's daughter and valued less; outsiders are looked up to and called 'sir' or 'madam'"

Some community groups endorsed this view and said that outsiders were trusted more as they were perceived to have more information and knowledge. This reinforced the importance of provision of adequate technical backstopping to SMs. Despite organisations seeking to ensure that SMs have relevant language skills, there were occasions when they did not know the local dialect which limited the proximity they had to communities. Those that weren't embedded within communities or those that were responsible for

¹¹ Buchanan-Smith M, Corpus Ong J, and Routley S (2015) Who's Listening: Accountability to affected people in the Haiyan response, Plan International. The study includes a detailed description of the history of AAP, the AAP approaches used by the case study organisations and powerful research with communities on their perceptions of the response. It can be found at <https://plan-international.org/publications/whos-listening>

large project areas sometimes found it challenging to visit all of the villages under their supervision and some communities complained that they were only visited four times within the lifespan of a project.

Funding

AAP activities were most frequently funded from within project budgets, rather than specific AAP budget lines. This meant that they were vulnerable to changes or reductions in budgets. It also meant that it was difficult for organisations to resource AAP consistently, particularly for donors that were less willing to fund accountability practices. There were a number of examples given of specific AAP tools being funded separately (see survey results below);

FROM THE SURVEY

4 INGOs considered themselves to have specific budget lines for AAP activities, such as toll-free numbers. Others said the cost of AAP activities such as consultations with communities were included within project activities and co-financed within SwS projects.

2.4 Commitment to monitoring AAP

There were some good examples observed of organisational commitments to monitor the level of community satisfaction with AAP approaches to ensure that they were effective. However, there was no evidence of systematic approaches taken to monitoring AAP as a whole and for most organisations, it tended to be undertaken in an ad hoc way. This ad hoc monitoring of AAP was usually undertaken by M&E staff; specific AAP questions were included in some surveys as demonstrated by the example from Helvetas (see figure 6);

GOOD PRACTICE

A post distribution monitoring survey for Helvetas' contained eight AAP-related questions in a 20-question survey. These included the following; 'were you able to access the grievance/complaints process?' and 'did you receive response from the project or realise an action was taken after your complaint?' and, 'are you satisfied with the information dissemination about project activities?' A household-level Kobo survey included the following questions; 'did you know you could complain?', 'were you involved in the process?', and 'do you feel your inputs were listened to and included?'

Some of the reporting that was reviewed included findings about levels of community satisfaction and awareness of AAP approaches, although these were not clearly linked to project improvement processes or to specific recommendations for changing agency practice. For example, in one monitoring report a stark difference was seen in the levels of awareness of the complaints mechanism in different project districts and a recommendation for this to be addressed. However, there was no analysis of why the differences might have occurred, or specific measures that should be taken to address this and so the link between the problem and solution was weak.

There is a need for organisations to make stronger commitments to systematically monitor community preferences for AAP approaches based on an understanding of who uses them and the levels of satisfaction that exist. The data that organisations generate on AAP could be used more purposively, particularly as it is frequently disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and location. Such data potentially offers helpful insights into the relevance of AAP approaches to different members of communities and could assist organisations to identify gaps. Staff responsible for such monitoring, should be competent in AAP, and trained, as should all project managers.

2.5 Commitments to working in partnership with local organisations

The government policy on International NGOs partnering local organisations for project implementation during the earthquake response placed significant implementation responsibility in the hands of local partners. The implications of this are discussed in detail in a recent report on partnership in the earthquake response;

"The Nepal earthquake has offered the international humanitarian community an opportunity to experience humanitarian response as it is likely to be delivered more frequently in the future – led by government and delivered by local organisations, with the international humanitarian system playing a support role."¹²

Different models of partnership were observed during the research; some organisations had long term strategic partners, and were involved in ongoing capacity assessments, training and support. One established local partner had moved to a new geographic area to partner an international NGO in a new activity and others had established

¹² Featherstone, A & Bogati, S (2016) Opportunity Knocks: Realising the Potential of Partnerships in the Nepal Earthquake Response, CAFOD, ActionAid, Tearfund, CARE, Christian Aid and Oxfam.

new partnerships for specific activities. Others contracted organisations to supply specific services, such as media partners, or construction contractors and adopted a hands-off approach in terms of their management.

Partner Assessment and capacity

Partner assessments were usually carried out by INGOs before the start of a project, but in only one example observed specifically including aspects of AAP;

GOOD PRACTICE

Save the Children's partner self-assessment tool included scoring against AAP criteria such as whether the partner have mechanisms in place for consulting with beneficiaries throughout all stages of the project, whether beneficiary groups and other key stakeholders were involved in the identification and design of programmes. Aspects of partner action plans included increasing participation of beneficiaries and the importance of taking of feedback from beneficiaries into account - although no details were included of how this should be undertaken. Without agreements on the practical support to be provided, or a means of measuring improvement these sorts of agreements may have limited utility. It is unclear to what extent they contributed to improving AAP.

Local partners generally had limited institutional experience of humanitarian standards. They were considered to have a relatively weak knowledge and implementation capacity for AAP and as a consequence, required support despite having experience of working with communities. Limited evidence of partner training or capacity building for AAP was found during the research. Where it did occur, it tended to focus on International NGOs complaints mechanisms, and the use of their databases and forms/systems for recording feedback.

FROM THE SURVEY

All of the 8 international NGOs which completed the survey said they expected partners to make provision for AAP activities within their work. 6 partners said aspects of AAP were a specific part of their agreements with partners. Examples that were given included; carrying out specific consultation meetings, agreements about specific roles to strengthen communication and relationships with the community (e.g. through public reviews, strengthening children's club membership). 4 organisations said they funded specific AAP partner activities and the work of SMs was considered to be a specific AAP function by some organisations.

The roles of INGOs and their partners in AAP

Partners tended to provide the 'soft' components of programmes and were responsible for recruiting and managing the SM staff. There is a need to address the subcontracting nature of partnerships and instead give partners greater responsibility for design and implementation of AAP approaches.

For AAP specifically, partners generally had responsibility for aspects of information dissemination to communities and the collection of feedback and some complaints. Feedback was expected to be referred onto INGOs for documentation within their systems in order to allow international NGOs to adapt activities and resolve the concerns. There were only a few examples given of partner staff being encouraged to address issues directly in the field, which tended to occur only when there were no financial implications to the changes that were proposed. The onus was largely placed on partners to pass feedback to the international NGO to resolve.

GOOD PRACTICE

Caritas policy stated that the receiver of the complaint could deal with it immediately, but that the information needed to be recorded and forwarded to the district coordinator.

The power dynamics often made it difficult for partners to respond to feedback received by communities directly as managerial and financial responsibility was held by the international NGO. This was a considerable frustration, and greater responsibility should be given to partner staff so they can play a broader role in AAP. Partners are seen as the link between communities and international NGOs which is important, but this tended to diminish their role in AAP.

In the future, it will be important that local partners are given more responsibility for managing and implementing a full range of AAP activities, and that they are given better access to direct sources of funding for AAP. Incorporating the views and experience of local staff, and involving them in design and adaptation of activities based on communities' views and feedback, should be a key part of AAP. There is an opportunity for a more detailed study of the models of partnership and the impact that each of these have on AAP. With the World Humanitarian Summit Grand Bargain Commitments on localisation in mind, AAP offers an opportunity to start the localisation conversation.

POOR PRACTICE

Some senior management complained of the inequality in their relationship with International NGOs and voiced their frustrations at the budgets that they were allocated. Many said they would like to have a greater share of the project responsibility and more control in setting budgets. Salaries for comparable roles were said to be lower within partner organisations and international NGOs were perceived to have large teams of staff for each project, while local partners supported multiple projects with far fewer staff. These challenges affected SMs, project coordinators and technical staff.

The Government has a set of mandatory accountability tools and procedures for all projects which are agreed and many organisations used these as a basis for their AAP approaches.

GOOD PRACTICE

One organisation said it based its accountability mechanisms on the tools set out in the government procedures, such as public hearings, public reviews, public audits and project inception. These mechanisms were familiar to people and were felt to enhanced accountability to local people.

2.6 Commitments to government accountability mechanisms

It is important that AAP is viewed within the wider framework of existing local and government processes and structures. Partners must also have a good understanding of the dynamics, and be aware of the opportunities and pitfalls of working closely with government and local authorities. Key stakeholders must be identified and relationships maintained throughout responses. In Nepal, organisations demonstrated a commitment to collaborating closely with the government and maintaining strong relationships:

Agreement for NGO activities must be gained from the government at the central level, and project activities and budget details must be shared either with the Social Welfare Council (SWC) or the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). Organisations have little control over these processes and the time that they took was often lengthily. There was felt to be limited flexibility to change projects once agreement had been given, beyond minor adjustments as the example below shows.

Organisational AAP approaches were considered by government representatives to link closely to those of the government, and collaboration was generally considered to be good. Interviews suggested that government officials feel that INGO's AAP efforts support their work;

"NGOs have helped us to organise meeting between the community and ourselves. It is a positive thing, we do not have resource, as you see no meeting hall and we have no funds to provide tea.... NGOs are in constant touch with communities, so they help us by providing information...and they inform us of gaps." Rural municipality chair person."

One of the risks of this way of working is that NGOs are perceived to be doing the work of the government, and get involved in issues that go beyond their mandates and responsibility;

"on the one hand, we feel INGOs encroach on our authority, create divides between us and the people that elected us, but on the other hand I think they help us perform better" elected representative from the Rural Municipality."

Figure 5, Example of the challenges of working with the government

For one earthquake reconstruction project, the technical component was agreed with the relevant authorities and work was started while the 'soft' components were delayed many months, compromising the overall effectiveness and accountability of the program. Once the initial authorization had been received, the organisation felt that it had little choice but to continue implementing the agreed activities as they had initially been designed and presented, although the relevance of some of the activities was questionable in the absence of the 'soft' components which had not been authorised.

Some government officials said they thought that community members should approach them directly rather than raise concerns via NGOS.

2.7 Beneficiary Selection to ensure inclusive AAP

Targeting and beneficiary selection are crucial tools to ensure that relevant people are included in projects, and the most vulnerable receive assistance. Beneficiary selection was considered to be a constant challenge to organisations, with selection processes seen as contentious and divisive, leading to conflicts within communities and high volumes of complaints. This was in part due to sensitivities regarding the approach of the government which was to adopt a blanket

approach. There was also a strong sense of injustice about targeting specific groups in communities. Some people affected by the earthquake said that they felt targeting some members of the community and not others was unfair given they had all been affected by the earthquake. Organisations have tried various approaches to target projects to the most vulnerable communities, or the most vulnerable people within communities. This required taking more time during the inception stage to conduct multiple levels of analyses said to understand the nature of vulnerability.

GOOD PRACTICE

Score cards were used by several organisations as a means of prioritising and selecting groups for activities and projects. These scored households according to a range of indicators which included gender/ethnicity, economic status, district and household size, with some indicators such as gender and ethnicity carrying more weight than others.

Some organisations gave responsibility to community or user groups for managing selection processes against set criteria, and for making the decisions and informing community members. These tended to have quite mixed results as the processes were often hard to manage, particularly when the rationale for selecting some people over others was not always considered to be clear, or adequately explained. Some International NGOs passed complaints back to user groups to resolve, rather than taking responsibility for managing the concerns themselves. This was found to be very frustrating and was not felt to be a good example of AAP. It would seem short-sighted to sub-contract difficult decisions on beneficiary selection to community groups, particularly in the absence of providing adequate support to help them managed decision-making processes and complaints resolution.

Other organisations attempted to use lists prepared by the government based on criteria such as household size, number of children and ethnicity, but the process was still considered to be problematic as there were many gaps in the data and government lists were often outdated. One organisation was in the process of developing a detailed household vulnerability survey in order to get beyond some of the common determinants of vulnerability, such as ethnicity and gender.

Beneficiary selection is something that the international humanitarian community has failed to manage well in a number of responses. High levels of complaints suggest that a more substantive change is needed in approaches that go beyond adjustments to targeting criteria, and individual

resolutions around who is and isn't included. Issues around targeting need to be addressed at policy level, as part of a dialogue between the respective organisation and the government.

Section 3

Approaches used to share information

The CHS states that information about organisations and their projects should be made publically available in a way that is easily understandable by different members of the community, and particularly marginalised groups. This section seeks to describe and analysis the approaches used to share project information with communities.

3.1 Organisational practice

Information and communication are important forms of aid, and allow people to gain access to assistance, to participate in decision-making to improve its relevance, and to hold organisations to account for its quality. For these reasons, sharing information with crisis-affected communities contributes to more effective programmes and improves the quality of assistance.

A wide range of approaches to information dissemination in the field were observed which varied significantly within and between projects according to the type of assistance and the target group. Some organisations were found to use a wide range of different approaches within each project and location, while others focused on a much smaller menu of options. The need for different types of information at different stages of the project was highlighted by many staff. The important role that SM staff played in the provision of information was emphasised. The table in the annex provides a detailed analysis of the 16 main tools used to disseminate information at the community level.

Radio and TV jingles, public service announcements and adverts were used in the early stages after the earthquake to provide information about basic project information to a large audience. The sorts of information that was broadcast included details of activities, timings, locations and target groups. Several organisations developed programmes in coordination with media organisations and journalists in order to provide more tailored information to specific communities and activities. Staff helped media organisations to consult with community members and identify issues for discussion within shows. These

shows described beneficiary involvement in projects and the benefit of the activities, often using community interviews. Regular programmes were aired locally to provide progress reports on activities.

FROM THE SURVEY

All International NGO staff that participated in the survey listed the methods they used for providing information which included information boards, posters and community meetings by project staff. A smaller number used radio shows, social media, mobile phones, help desks and committees in all or some of their projects.

Information about project activities and budgets were shared with the government centrally, and at district level with political and government officials. A range of multi-stakeholder meetings were held with community members, their representatives, local government officials and political leaders. These meetings allowed information about project activities, budgets, staff, target groups and beneficiaries to be disseminated and for the details to be publically discussed and clarified. There was a strong presence of partner staff in the field, and SM staff played a crucial role in information provision at the start of projects and throughout implementation. They went door-to-door explaining and clarifying information and answering questions. This was done to allow more detailed discussions and for staff to cross-check that people had understood the information, and to identify gaps. Technical sector staff, such as engineers were on hand at regular intervals, often 3-4 times a month, to supply technical information.

Committees and user groups were established or existing ones were supported and these played an important role in providing information to members and representing their constituents to organisations. Mobile phones were used by organisations to provide information about the timing of meetings. Committee leaders were often used as focal points to pass on information to the wider community. The same leaders were also used by community members if there was a need to make contact with organisations to request clarification. Calls were made to staff, offices, hotlines and toll-free numbers established by organisations for the purpose of information sharing.

Written information was provided through a range of media which included flexes, posters, hoarding boards, and business cards; these contained the contact details of staff, key project information and at times, also included descriptions of how to make feedback/complaints. Flexes were used by one organisation, and mandatory within all meetings. These described the specific activity, training components, the names of staff, the value of refreshments, the cost of any stationary, the cost of room hire, and transportation options. They also provided mobile numbers, email addresses of staff in case of questions or grievances.

3.2 Analysis of organisational performance

Information dissemination was considered to be strongest during the initial phase of projects. Information about the organisation was frequently provided included staff names, intended activities, contact numbers, complaints mechanisms and hotline numbers. Phone numbers were often given as contact numbers, rather than complaints numbers.

Informing people how to provide feedback was perceived to deepen relationships and trust, as historically, there was considered to be little communication around assistance provided. Despite this, there were a few limited examples of misunderstandings and rumours, and staff said some of the feedback/complaints that they had received suggested that some of the information that had been provided had not been properly understood by community members.

Information provision was felt to have been weaker later on in projects, at which time, organisations were not always as responsive to the changing needs of communities and nor were they so quick to address misinformation or rumours. This meant that confusion was not addressed in such a timely way. In one instance, consultations conducted by the research team suggested that misinformation had led to some people withdrawing from a project; the organisation's SM was aware of this issue,

but was unable to provide the correct information due to a lack of knowledge.

The public multi-stakeholder meetings were felt by organisations and communities to have provided very clear initial information about projects. They were also said to help people understand key issues, as they permitted discussion and clarification of issues. Some women said they liked listening to the information being discussed publicly 'we know what everyone else knows so then we can discuss it with them, how can we discuss something only we know'. Ensuring everyone had the same information was said to have helped to avoid misunderstandings and rumours. Transparency assisted in fostering trust as everyone had the same information. That said, not everyone attended these meetings with women and marginalised groups least likely to.

Some very good examples were observed of a concerted campaign of information provision within the shelter sector, which was closely linked to the government. Some organisations were very clear about the important link they played between communities and the government and felt that it was important to facilitate information flow between the two. Information around beneficiary selection was seen to be contentious, with people frequently complaining that they did not understand the criteria, and could not comprehend why some people had been selected or not selected;

We don't know why some people got pigs and goats, even rich people and some of us didn't. We asked the user group, who said it followed the partners criteria, and told us to ask them. When we went to visit the partner, they said it was the user group who decided, so we have no idea" FGD participant.

It was felt that the information dissemination tools used could have been better contextualised and adapted to the various target groups. The rationale for the selection of tools for a particular context was not always clear, and only on three occasions did organisations say they had worked with their partners or community members to selection information dissemination tools. It sometimes felt that organisations were using all the tools available to them, rather than tailoring them to the needs of the target group and the specific project activity. Although some good examples were seen of approaches being developed for specific target groups;

GOOD PRACTICE

A range of specific information dissemination tools were developed by one organisation including; pocket calendars for men, stickers for children and picture posters for young mothers. Approaches such as help desks were used during specific project activities, such as distributions or medical interventions. Female Community Health Workers (FCHW), vets and teachers played a role in passing on information to specific groups.

At times, there was felt to be a dissonance between the provision of information and people's understanding of it. Some women said the information was too complicated, the language was unfamiliar to them, and that they heard it but didn't understand it. Most, although not all, community members in FGDs were able to list the types of information they had received and even recount the information on posters, contained on the fliers, and disseminated in other ways. Most people knew where to find the contact details and phone numbers for organisations. However, some interviews highlighted a lack of understanding of complaints processes, despite the details being presented to them by staff. Some sources of information were more passive in nature, such as radio broadcasts, and people said they didn't take in the information that they heard, or forgot it after hearing it. One lady said, *'radio talks but it hasn't taught me anything, it just flows through me'*. Such information may have been too general to be of interest, or not specifically related to an activity. Radio and TV shows were sometimes developed by media organisations in Kathmandu in batches, and not necessarily tailored to the local context, or project. There is a need to reinforce key messages in several different ways, and throughout projects, and to cross check and monitor the levels of understanding.

Given the positive feedback about pictorial information, it was disappointing to see the number of posters, flexes and information boards which contained large amounts of text, and no pictures. Although despite the challenges written information presented to illiterate community members, it was still considered to be of value as it was relayed to them and discussed. The frequent use of the Nepali language for radio programmes and written information, limited its accessibility to some groups due to local dialects. Most project staff spoke Nepali and relied on local partners and SMs for translation. Some information had been adapted from English, and staff said it was complicated and that they frequently had to explain humanitarian terms.

3.3 Monitoring of information sharing

Only a few organisations were found to monitor the effectiveness of their information provision, and to seek community feedback on preferences and how they used the information.

GOOD PRACTICE

As part of Save the children's process of recording the complaints and feedback they received from beneficiaries, they asked how people had been informed about the complaints mechanism. This information was analysed as part of their monthly accountability report. The report for August 2017 showed that the most common way that complainants received information about the complaints process was during orientation sessions (66% of the total); the second most common way was through Save the Children and partner staff or other community members (21% of the total). 9% read about it in printed material, 3% was made aware of the process through radio jingles and 1% read about it on hoarding boards. Save the children felt this gave them a useful indicator of the effectiveness of their information approaches.

Specific questions related to the provision of information were also observed in some organisation's surveys and monitoring reports; One household level Kobo survey included two relevant questions; 'were the information materials easy to understand?' and 'what are the top three ways you receive information...that you trust?' One PDM survey asked beneficiaries whether they knew why they had been selected for the project and whether they had been informed about project objectives and targeting criteria.

Answers to these questions provided organisations with valuable insight about perceptions of the effectiveness of approaches; they also indicated discrepancies in knowledge between different locations. There was no evidence of analysis having been undertaken within communities to determine the levels of understanding of different groups within a community. People could have been asked how they prefer to receive information; whether they listen to the radio, or use written information, for example during the assessment stage. This could have guided the selection of approaches.

3.4 Key issues for the provision of information

Who provides information, matters

Some project information provided by local SMs was not always trusted, particularly when the person was well known by the community. Some people said they preferred technical information to be provided by engineers. People from Kathmandu were said to have more authority, which was felt to undermine local staff at times ('when people come from Kathmandu and tell us things, we believe them' male FGD). Some SMs said they didn't always have [the information that people were asking for, and as a consequence, they were not always able to answer questions directly, which they felt weakened trust in them.

Male and female preferences

Most of the information received by communities was said to be from SM door-to-door visits, although a lot of information was also shared through multi stakeholder meetings. Flexes (heavy duty posters) were said to be preferred by some groups, these provided quite specific information about ongoing activities such as the cost of room hire and refreshments. They were hung up at the start of each activity and the information read out, for one organisation this was mandatory for staff to do for each activity, which seemed at times to be a distraction from the activities itself. The use of mobile phones was seen to vary between groups, and was said to differ by education and literacy levels, gender and ethnicity. Organisations relied heavily on mobile phones to provide basic information about meetings, locations and planned activities, and they were sometimes used by communities to clarify information and ask questions, although sometimes women felt excluded by this approach;

POOR PRACTICE

Some women said that if male user group representatives were informed of meetings, they did not always pass the information to women. There is a need for organisations to monitor who may not be receiving information in order to ensure that they can be informed by other means.

A preference was expressed by both men and women for receiving information face-to-face during door-to-door visits where they felt most

able to discuss issues and raise questions, or in small group discussions with the SMs. There were other patterns that were observed in the preferences of men and women who were interviewed;

- Men said they received information from community members such as teachers and elected representatives or local political party leaders. They said radio and television were useful for more general information (12 of the 18 said they preferred television to radio). In areas without electricity, households said they watched television by solar power.
- Women said they received most information door-to-door and followed by meetings. Women said they liked the use of pictorial posters which they were given to put up in their homes, as they could regularly look at the information. Women received a lot of their information second-hand via neighbours, and their husbands, and were not always informed directly. Female community health workers were also an important source of information, particularly for young women. Older men and women tended to listen to the radio, whilst a group of young mothers said they would prefer to receive information via Facebook.

The CDAC study 'Are you listening now?'¹³ provides details of research undertaken with communities after the earthquake on their preferences around information provision. It showed a big mismatch between local people's preferred channels and sources of information and the channels used by humanitarian responders. While local people valued mass communication such as radio and TV for general news and information after the earthquake, they expressed a strong preference for face-to-face communication and dialogue for information that was directly relevant to them and to their needs.

3.5 Recommendations

There were a number of examples of good practice and overall a wide range of tools were seen to be in use. There were also some areas for learning and improvement. The widespread use of face-to-face information provision is commendable, and should be continued. Organisations need to place a greater focus on providing information specifically to strengthen AAP and to monitor the effectiveness of such information.

¹³ Margie Buchanan-Smith, Subindra Bogati and Sarah Routley, Are You Listening Now? Community Perspectives on Communicating with Communities During the Nepal Earthquake Response, CDAC network May 2016. The report details an extensive study of peoples experience of information following the earthquake and their needs. It looks at the usefulness of information provided and preferences of how people wanted to receive information.

It was felt that a wide tool box of approaches was useful for organisations to select from, but that organisations needed to better adapt tools for target groups and activities. Better use could be made of radio and other media, and programmes could be better targeted to groups in communities, events and project activities. The use of local media and journalists should be priorities, with shows created locally and involving local communities, rather than centrally in Kathmandu. Consultations highlighted the importance of mix of approaches for provision of information to all groups in the community, and the risk of excluding women and marginalised groups when relying on one such as written information, or mixed meetings. There was a need for organisations to better monitor the way in which information is passed on through communities, and from representatives to ensure groups are not excluded. It was also felt that organisations missed an opportunity during assessment, surveys and inception to systematically ask different community groups their preferences for receiving information. It was disappointing that approaches were rarely specifically tailored for women or marginalised groups.

Organisations should priorities the type of information they want and need to share with communities more strategically. At times it felt project details were provided for the sake of it, or only for the sake of transparency, whilst more substantive AAP messages, such as the role of feedback in improving project quality where not shared. In some instances, it seemed that project participants were overwhelmed with detailed information which played a limited role on supporting AAP and even distracted from the real purpose of activities. It is recommended that;

Assessment and Planning

- Inclusion of questions about people's preferences for receiving information at assessment, or inception stage, would allow organisations to better develop information approaches tailored to the specific community groups
- Field staff should be given more authority to adapt tools to specific target group and projects. Potential ideas include stickers for mobile phones, picture posters at locations frequented by women such as water points and washing areas.
- More use should be made of pictures and local radio to disseminate information, and the use of social media and Facebook explored for some groups.

Monitoring

- Organisations should systematically monitor which groups are receiving information and those that are being left out, this may include recording those who don't attend meetings, in order to allow follow up with a different approach.

Implementation

- Organisations should routinely provide information to marginalised groups and women on their own, or in separate forums to men.
- Organisations should respond to rumours and misinformation in a timely way, and be more responsive to information gaps that arise throughout implementation. Staff should be encouraged to report these needs when they arise.
- There is a need to support SM staff and enhance their legitimacy to provide information, for example by ensuring they are well trained, and able to call the organisation at any time to ask questions.
- Local media and journalists should be used to provided upto date targeted and relevant information.
- There is a need for more strategic AAP information to be shared, such as the role of feedback, and complaints in improving project quality, and the rights of community members in relation to AAP. Staff need to be able to prioritise the information they provide and ensure it is fulfilling a role within communities, information for information's sake can overwhelm communities and detract from important communication.

Section 4

Approaches used to ensure engagement in decision-making

The CHS states that organisations should ensure the inclusive representation and participation of affected people in decisions that affect them. It also considers that the views of all groups in the community should guide the design and implementation of projects. Different levels of participation maybe appropriate at different times, and within different projects. Organisations should pay particular attention to groups, or individuals traditionally excluded from power or decision making. This section seeks to analysis the approaches used to ensure affected people participated in decision making.

4.1 Organisational practice

The research showed that community members were regularly involved in deciding priorities, activities and the selection of beneficiaries at the initial stages of projects. This was usually achieved through community meetings. Committees and user groups were supported, or new ones were established to play specific roles within projects. Targets were generally set to guide the composition of committees in order to support adequate representation of women, marginalised groups, specific ethnic groups and people with disabilities. Consultations, and adaptations were made to the locations and timing of activities to ensure groups could participate. The role of radio and SMs were considered to be important in promoting participation in activities and sharing of opportunities for community members to be involved.

4.2 Analysis of organisational performance

User groups were often cited by project staff as a good way for organisations to involve community members in decision making, with varying degrees of power being delegated to them. Committees were sometimes given responsibility to make key decisions about project activities, or were requested to choose from several activities either individually, or collectively. Members were engaged in roles such as designing activities, maintaining project infrastructure, undertaking repairs, managing budgets and monitoring progress. Conversely, some groups acted as little more than a contact point for partners to the

wider community, and played a far more limited role in projects. User groups were considered to be a good vehicle for participation in decision-making, particularly when they were already in existence before the project had started. In these cases, they tended to be more representative and inclusive than some of the more recently-formed groups.

GOOD PRACTICE

A user group that had existed for over 60 years was supported by an organisation to manage the repair of an irrigation canal. The group was responsible for deciding how the repair should be conducted, budget allocation, the procurement of materials, management of activities, reporting on expenditure, and monitoring progress. It was given a budget which it could allocate to certain expenditure and it was also empowered to raise funds for additional activities that it wanted to undertake as well as playing a role in mobilising and organising the community to support the project work. One of the main reasons given for the successful engagement of the group was its longevity, as a result of which it had gained the trust and respect of the community.

The level of participation in decision making varied greatly between projects and activities visited. The greatest levels of participation observed when; there was a clear benefit for those involved, when projects were targeted to specific groups, and when the group was well established

and included both men and women. Participants were felt to play a stronger role in decision making, when they had greater control over aspects of the project such as budgets, the selection of activities and their management.

One of the main challenges with the use of these groups is the risk that they are not entirely representative of those that they are representing. This was observed to be the case when the local representatives were men, or when different ethnic groups were involved and marginalised groups had less representation within the group. In more diverse groups it was felt to be a challenge to ensure all stakeholders were represented, and organisations tended to need to have greater involvement to ensure that they operated in an inclusive way, and that any concerns about representation were monitored and quickly addressed.

There were some good examples of decisions that were made within projects by community members; many of the livelihood projects permitted households to decide how they spent cash grants or what activities they wanted included with cash for work components. Construction projects allowed groups to make decisions about the procurement of materials, the contractors that were engaged and in the technical designs. They were also encouraged to oversee quality of the work.

Several organisations said that working closely with the government and basing their projects on national plans and government priorities encouraged community members to participate, as it gives them legitimacy and builds trust.

All organisations felt that the selection of local staff from within beneficiary communities was considered to have encouraged the participation of community members and also strengthened the inclusion of their views in project implementation and design. It was said that the SMs encouraged people to speak out and because they are known to community members and as a consequence, people felt more confident to express their views.

The level of participation of community members and inclusiveness of project processes was influenced by how beneficiaries and communities were selected. As discussed earlier in this report, this process was often contentious and led to a significant number of complaints. It was often the case that most community members were in a similar situation, and so it seemed unfair to select some individuals for a project and not others. It was also difficult for more marginalised groups to have a say in decisions as they tended to be poorly represented in groups.

4.3 Recommendations/tools

A wide range of techniques and approaches were seen to be in use to encourage the participation of community members in decision making within projects. Organisations tried to ensure representation of different community groups within projects, with varying levels of success. The level of participant involvement in decision making varied considerably between projects, with participants or some projects being involved in substantive decisions around implementation, and others limited to decisions around timing and locations of activities. It was felt that in general more decision-making responsibility could be passed to project participants and committees members, with the caveat that careful monitoring was needed of how representative these groups were of the community as a whole. Partner field staff played a strong role in encouraging engagement in projects, and this should be continued and supported. It was felt that more could have been done to ensure marginalised groups and women were represented in committees and participated in decision making. The following recommendations are made:

Assessment and planning

- People should be consulted on how they would like to participate in decision making and groups asked who they would like to represent them.
- More effective ways of examining vulnerability at household level should be explored and moving away from traditional views of ethnicity as the key determinant of vulnerability. Processes that involve different peoples views along with community members and elected people's representatives should guide beneficiary selection and decisions around vulnerability, and care should be taken for processes not to become politicised.
- Organisations should conduct assessments of any committee or user group, to assess how representative it is of the full diversity of the community and which groups are at risk of being left out.
- Organisations should proactively seek out pre-existing indigenous mechanisms or committees that are considered to be inclusive and that could represent community members and oversee project implementation;

Implementation

- Particular attention should be paid to approaches to actively facilitate the involvement of groups, or individuals traditionally excluded from power or decision making, this may include women and particular marginalised groups and their of their representatives. They may need the one on one support of field staff and nurturing and empowering, throughout the life of the project.
- Project participants should be given a greater control over aspects of the project such as budgets, the selection of activities and their management where possible and empowered to make substantive decisions.
- It could be emphasized within information dissemination that community members are encouraged, or even expected to participate in projects targeted for them.
- Further learning is required to inform policy and processes around beneficiary selection and monitoring. It is essential that international NGOs and their local partners are aware of the potential for beneficiary selection to have negative impacts and seek to mitigate these to the extent possible;

Monitoring

- The risk of user groups or committees making decisions on behalf of marginalised groups should be closely monitored and feedback received used to examine if there are groups who have been left out.
- Beneficiary selection processes should be monitored and that people have an access to an effective complaints mechanism and recourse, even if decision-making responsibility rests with community committees or user groups.



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Section 5

Approaches used to listen to affected people

The CHS states that organisations should encourage and facilitate affected people to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of projects in order to guide programme design and implementation throughout the project cycle. It suggests that approaches should pay particular attention to the age, gender and diversity of those giving feedback and they should ensure inclusive representation and participation in decision making. This section analyses the approaches used by organisations to seek feedback and listen to the voice of affected people.

5.1 Organisational practice

Listening carefully to people improves the quality of response and contributes to more effective programmes. When people have the opportunity to voice their opinions, this enhances their sense of well-being, helps them adapt to the challenges they face and better enables them to take an active role in their own recovery. Specific feedback on the level of satisfaction with activities and suggestions for improvement plays an important role in improving quality and effectiveness of projects.

Feedback was gathered by organisations by using a mix of informal and formal mechanisms, both at specific times and throughout the duration of projects. Some approaches required community members to react to problems or concerns that they encounter by contacting organisations in writing, via the phone or by meeting with staff. For these type of approaches, access for all members of the community, and particularly for marginalised groups and women can be a limitation. Some reactive approaches such as suggestion boxes and phone calls allow feedback to be provided at any time and for an immediate response and can be quite responsive but they also have their limitations (see also figure 16).

Figure 6, The challenges posed by reactive feedback mechanisms

The Listen Learn Act Project was critical about what it considered to be an over-reliance by humanitarian agencies on CRMs. The report laments that 'complaints response mechanisms offer only partial accountability and are reactive and yet they are frequently considered to meet NGO accountability needs. It is essential that the dominant accountability narrative in the sector is changed to promote accountability mechanisms that proactively seek feedback from a representative sample of the community across a broader range of accountabilities articulated in the CHS'.¹⁴

Proactive approaches to eliciting feedback are found less frequently, but these provide an ongoing process of engaging with communities and monitoring levels of satisfaction. Ongoing satisfaction surveys and weekly or monthly visits by project staff offer communities a regular opportunity to discuss project progress and permit the collection and analysis of trends. Constant feedback throughout the project, and feedback provided verbally can also create a challenge to

¹⁴ Featherstone, A (2017) Placing accountability at the heart of humanitarian assistance: Lessons from the Listen Learn Act Project. DanChurch Aid, Ground Truth Solutions and Save the Children.

organisation, as it is difficult to ensure it is systematically recorded and captured within management and of decision making processes.

Organisations were observed to have invested significant effort into obtaining feedback from community members via their staff, during visits and meetings. They used various approaches to ensure they recruited the right staff, in the right place to help facilitate this.

5.2 Analysis of organisational performance

In the early stages of projects, feedback was most frequently obtained through household visits and the multi-stakeholder meetings that allowed discussion about project activities, beneficiary selection, and consultation on needs and priorities. These approaches were considered by communities to be of greatest value at the initial stages of the project, when they allowed for activities to be tailored to community views. Organisations said feedback tended to drop off after the initial stages of projects, or after the main activities had been undertaken. Engagement could be rekindled by project and M&E staff visits.

FROM THE SURVEY

In order to obtain feedback, international NGOs listed a range of approaches which included regular formal meetings, informal meetings and community interactions, informal and formal meetings with community leaders and government officials. Help desks, suggestion boxes and toll-free numbers were also used in a smaller number of projects.

Feedback was provided continuously by community members during SM household visits, informal meetings and by mobile phone calls. This type of feedback tended to be related to certain activities and in response to specific questions and information about event timings, the content of training and the location of activities. Feedback forms were often used by organisations to try to record these questions, which were then discussed during regular team meetings between partner field staff, M&E staff and project staff at the field level. These discussions were held in order to share issues and concerns within the organisation and to ensure that issues were documented and that, where necessary, were escalated to managers. Despite the existence of a process in theory, capturing the issues in the first instance was said to be a challenge. Organisations felt these processes worked relatively well, but it was a constant challenge to ensure feedback was captured.

User groups and committees acted as conduits for obtaining feedback, as well as passing messages to project staff, most often by phone calls. Staff often then returned calls in order to ask the groups view or preference. Despite the existence of policies which determined the composition of groups and the setting of targets for the number of women, marginalised groups, and in several cases, disabled people, who should have formed a part of such groups, consultations suggested these groups were not always inclusive. Some members said they were never asked their views, with a single representative of a group considered to be the mouthpiece for all feedback. Women frequently complained that it was hard for them to pass information through men, and several examples were given of local committee/user groups representatives that were entirely male in that location. These findings suggest that closer monitoring of issues of inclusion and exclusion may be required, and the identification of any gaps. Particular consultations may need to be held consultation those missing from prevailing approaches.

Multi-stakeholder meetings provided an opportunity for feedback about levels of satisfaction and they provided a platform for issues and concerns to be raised. These were considered to be better suited to men and a few confident representatives; conversely, women and marginalised groups often hesitated to speak out in public forums such as these. Given common Nepali family values, this should come as no surprise, as some women felt that their husbands would not be happy if they spoke out. Women said they passed feedback to their husbands to raise and that despite their reluctance to speak they liked to attend these meetings as 'whatever was in their mind, someone else might say', and that they found it useful to hear the discussions and the questions that were asked. It was surprising that so many mixed meetings took place with very little provision for meeting with groups of women on their own, particularly when so many projects were explicitly targeted at more marginalised groups. This was expressed by a ward member participating in a woman-only FGD;

"organisations bring men and women together for meetings, but look at this discussion today, women are speaking a lot, as it's only for women. In previous mixed meetings, I noticed only men spoke and women were silent. Men and women need to have separate meetings"

The radio was mostly used for one way information provision, but some limited feedback was obtained through radio interviews and broadcast discussions. It was felt that this approach could have played a more significant role, with more chat shows and phone ins being used to facili-

tate feedback. There was no use made of social media or Facebook pages which could have been used to obtain feedback from some groups, as suggested by young women. Suggestion boxes placed at project sites provided a means of confidential and formal feedback. Some people said they used this to provide feedback jointly as a group, or for confidentially. However, the boxes were frequently considered to have limited utility by organisations, as responses were considered to be slow, with boxes only being opened every 2-4 weeks. Help desks at project sites such as training venues or at distributions were often set up and were used to obtain feedback on specific activities, and to give instant feedback and resolution to concerns and queries. The desks often sought to gauge immediate feedback on the levels of satisfaction of an activity, which was reportedly often positive.

Organisational databases showed from where feedback has been received; in one example, out of a total of 4,592 pieces of feedback, 54% was received from a toll-free number, 28.9% was received during monitoring visits and 6.1% was received via suggestion boxes. In another example, out of a total of 42 pieces of feedback received in a single month, 33 were received via suggestion boxes, 5 arrived by letter, 3 were given directly to the staff at a district office and 1 was made to a field staff member.

There were examples of good practices that were observed where organisations had developed approaches for particular target groups, such as children;

GOOD PRACTICE

Caritas provided an introduction to how children can feedback to child club members and student representatives within its school rehabilitation project, in order to encourage their feedback on the services they were providing.

Save the Children's district Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning officers conducted children's consultations on a monthly basis. Children were disaggregated by gender and age and their opinions were elicited on specific aspects of the project through games and child friendly tools. Their views on the strengths, gaps and areas of improvement for each intervention were recorded and analysed.

The type of feedback received by organisations

A wide range of feedback was observed to have been gathered which was often more-focused on complaints. Within databases, the categorisation of feedback and complaints allowed these different types of engagement to be differentiated. One organisation's database comprised 35% requests for information, 35% requests for assistance, and 30% complaints. Feedback was categorised as (i) positive or negative comments, (ii) a question, (iii) a complaint, (iv) a request for a change in an aspect of the project, or (v) a word of gratitude or appreciation.

From a cultural perspective, it was felt that people were reluctant to comment and give negative feedback on project activities. This often meant that feedback tended to be positive. More careful use of language by NGO staff that distinguishes between levels the different types of feedback sought and distinction of satisfaction from complaints might help to overcome the cultural reluctance to provide negative feedback. Staff from a number of organisations felt that opportunities to explain the positive role of feedback in improving programmes was often being missed.

The research found that feedback from community members on the level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of projects was encouraged and collected at certain times. This task was usually undertaken by M&E teams. Specific questions on satisfaction levels were often included in surveys, such as post distribution monitoring surveys, Kobo surveys and in training feedback/evaluation forms.

GOOD PRACTICE

As part of a post-distribution monitoring survey, Save the Children included a question about satisfaction levels during the following processes;

- Beneficiary selection and registration
- Work processes within the project
- Payment processes
- Payment amounts
- The role of community project management committees
- The performance of staff and partners

The responses to these questions were analysed to show the overall levels of satisfaction and where lower levels of satisfaction were identified in activities, recommendations were made for specific improvements to be made. In this example, the level of satisfaction across all aspects was considered to be high, at over 90%.

Examples were observed of organisations actively encouraging feedback on satisfaction levels, and offering explanations about why it was important to provide an honest account. As the example below shows the terms ‘feedback’ and ‘complaints’ were often used interchangeably by staff, and this possibly gave feedback an overall negative connotation;

One flier contained pictorial representations of all the ways in which feedback and complaints could be provided and requested, ‘to make our work effective, and quality and transparent your suggestions are important.’ Underneath the message it gave a contact number.

5.3 Recommendations

In the survey and during interviews, staff felt that the approaches they used to listen to people were broadly effective (indicated as either ‘extremely’ effective, or ‘moderately’ effective in the online survey). Despite this optimism, the research experienced the challenges of trying to elicit feedback, particularly negative feedback from communities.

In addition to ensuring that all community members are able to provide feedback, there needed to be a stronger emphasis on proactively encouraging feedback on satisfaction levels, as part of a process to understand and improve the quality of programmes. Approaches to do this must be supported by an effective system to document and analyse the feedback that is received and to ensure that it reaches managers and that follow-up action is taken.

It is important that any gaps in feedback that is received are monitored throughout the life of projects, to provide information about groups that are not providing feedback, to allow tailored efforts to engage ‘missing voices’. In the context of Nepal, special efforts are required to elicit feedback and levels of satisfaction, particularly with women and marginalised groups. Recommendations include the following;

Assessment and planning

- Community members should be asked how they prefer to communicate and give feedback to organisations, this should form a part of surveys. Approaches should be designed to routinely consult women and marginalised groups separately from others.
- The role of radio, television and social media should be better developed within projects to include two-way communication and discussions about the levels of satisfaction and suggested improvements to activities.

Implementation

- Initial information dissemination should explain the importance of obtaining feedback from communities, actively encourage people to provide feedback on the services they receive and levels of satisfaction.
- There is a need for more explanation of the positive role that feedback plays in improving programming as well as the importance of differentiating it from complaints.

Monitoring

- Stronger processes and clear staff responsibilities are needed to ensure that feedback, particular verbal feedback is analysed to ensure trends are picked up on and it feeds into processes that allows changes and remedial actions to be made to projects. Staff should be encouraged to share it routinely in meetings and organisations must ensure they have processes to report it systematically to decision makers and senior managers.

Section 6

Approaches used to handle complaints

The CHS states that affected people should have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints. Complaints should be welcomed and accepted by staff and mechanisms and how they can be accessed clearly explained. Complained must be listened to and acted upon, managed appropriately and addressed in a timely and fair manner. Members of communities including vulnerable and marginalised group should be informed and be aware of complaints mechanism. In this section the approaches used by organisations to manage complaints are analysed.

6.1 Organisational practice

Affected people have the right to complain to an organisation and to receive an appropriate and timely response. A complaints mechanism and a system for providing resolution to issues that are raised are key components of any AAP approach. Complaints allow organisations to address specific problems with the assistance that they are providing, deal with grievances against staff, or address serious misconduct. Complaints systems can help organisations to recognise and respond to serious issues and improve the quality of their programmes.

Staff from SwS partners were each able to articulate clear processes for handling of complaints and some also shared written procedures. Included in these were details of the process for receiving and recording complaints, specific staff responsibilities for addressing the issues raised and a timeframe for resolving the concerns.

FROM THE SURVEY

All organisations stated that they had a system in place to manage complaints, or had links to external systems of complaints handling that were relevant to their projects (such as health facilities or schools). Each organisation considered that its staff actively encouraged feedback, comment and complaints.

A number of organisations, but not all had databases which categorised feedback and complaints according to their nature and severity. These were disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, location and by the method through which the issue was received.

6.2 Analysis of organisational performance

The methods that people said they used most frequently to make complaints were through meetings, directly to staff members (e.g. via the SM), through user groups and committees, or by the mobile phone. Some community members stated a preference for raising complaints directly with staff as resolution was frequently immediate and they also had confidence that their complaint had been received. User groups and committees were also considered to be an effective way of obtaining swift redress.

FROM THE SURVEY

All of the organisations that completed the survey considered that their approaches for handling and responding to complaints were either 'extremely' or 'moderately' effective.

According to an analysis undertaken by the research team of one organisation's database, the majority of complaints received were received via mobile phone numbers (51% of the total), directly to staff (21%) or during monitoring visits (20%) or through suggestion boxes (2%).

During the FGDs, women said they complained largely to SMs or to their neighbours or husbands. Men said they wrote letters, called staff directly or used toll-free numbers. Depending on the level of accessibility, they also visited partner offices to make complaints. The multi-stakeholder meetings were preferred by some community members due to the immediacy of resolution and the transparency afforded by the public nature of the meeting.

Interviews revealed that men were more willing to make complaints than women. Disaggregated data from an organisation about who made complaints shows that from a total of 4,592 concerns that were entered into the system, 63.4% were made by men and 30.3% were made by women (the remaining 6.3% were not disaggregated by gender).

Disaggregation of complainants by ethnicity was harder to find; one example showed 40% of complainants were from groups that were considered to be upper caste, this highlights the importance of monitoring who is complaining and of using specific strategies to encourage complaints from marginalised groups or 'missing voices'. There was no data available to show if different genders or ethnic groups had a preference for specific approaches.

Information about how complaints could be made formed a part of organisations' initial dissemination of information. This was frequently reinforced by posters and information that was provided or on display at project sites. Phone numbers and toll-free numbers were frequently referred to as 'contact numbers' rather than 'complaints numbers' which some people may have found confusing.

Figure 7, Communicating complaints mechanisms

A flier distributed by Helvetas and Caritas described in pictorial form the four ways in which complaints could be made which included by phone, suggestion box, during meetings, and directly to staff. The flier included the contact details for the organisations.

Issues of confidentiality was explained in the information provided about some of the approaches. Some also outlined how feedback would be provided by the organisation to the complainant; one poster gave the following information about confidentiality, 'if you have complaints or suggestions contact us on this number, your identity will be anonymous, and you will be informed of any resolution.'

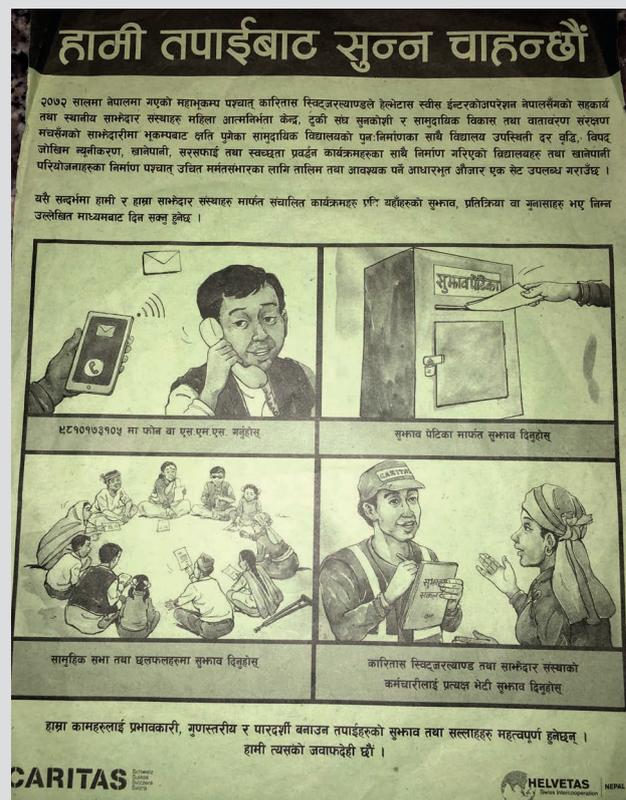
There were examples given of complaints being actively encouraged, with a number of staff indicating that they regularly explained to project participants that they had the right to make complaints. The majority of people consulted were aware that they could complain and how to do this, if they wished, although many also stated they did not want to complain about an organisation, and that they felt bad if they made complaints when people had come to help them. This reluctance was felt to be largely cultural, and that people were reluctant to make complaints about those that help them, and this is thought to be particular strong with organisations that have helped them since the earthquake and in 'their time of need'. It was also suggested this was linked to beliefs in fatalism and a view that problems faced were a result of things from previous lives. People frequently said, 'what will be will be', 'we can't change things'. This was linked to a strong sense of gratitude towards organisations, with people saying 'we can't complain as they have come to help us'. This was said to have been strongest when beneficiaries had been specifically selected for a project. Some staff members also said that this fatalistic mind set was at times linked to the pace of the governments recovery work, with people feeling there was nothing they could do to change this.

This is consistent with findings during the research in the Philippines (see footnote 11) which found that the sense of gratitude tended to be strongest towards international organisations as they were considered to be under no obligation to help. As a consequence, they were singled out for praise during the response. This was described as 'a debt of gratitude towards those that provided help and assistance beyond normal expectations of relationships'. And was said to have created a 'natural disincentive for many people to express criticism or dissatisfaction towards humanitarian organisations, who were seen to have no natural obligation to help'

It is suggested that explaining INGOs are working in local areas at the invitation of the government might help to reduce this since of gratitude and encourage them to do seen as 'doing what the government asks' rather than acting as a favour to selected communities. It was also felt that more need to be done at the community level to explain the potential role of complaints in improving

programme quality, and that more positive language needed to be used to overcome the cultural reluctance. Organisations need to work closely with field level local staff to investigate local appropriate ways in which complaints can be encouraged.

People said that they see their complaints are addressed, and that this is what encourages them to complain. Some organisations said the number of complaints were low in some of their projects, and that most were related to minor issues, very few serious complaints were received. Staff felt the limited number of serious complaints reflected the high quality of project activities and responsiveness of field staff, who were able to deal with issues before they became serious. There was a sometimes a tendency for staff to assume that people had nothing to complain about, and that everything was ok. There was a sense that once a project had started or had been agreed it couldn't be changed, and that it was too late to complain about it.



6.3 Key issues for complaints handling

What do people complain about?

In an example of database analysis complaints and feedback were analysed according to categories based on the level of their seriousness; (i) regular feedback, (ii) minor complaints and (iii) serious complaints, of which 24.1% were related complaints of minor dissatisfaction, such as missed kit or lack of follow up, 3% to major dissatisfaction, and 3% to breaches of codes of conduct, or policies.

As well as identifying particular issues for action, the analysis of complaints allowed for trends to be identified and monitored, with a lot of complaints on the same issues suggesting a more substantive problem that needed to be addressed. The research team felt that at times, organisations missed opportunities to use data most effectively.

Linking with the government as a key duty bearer

Several organisations said they specifically encouraged complaints beyond the scope of their own activities, for example relating to aspects of government policy. They referred these on to other stakeholders and duty bearers for resolution, and sometimes played a role in monitoring outcomes and advocating for redress.

GOOD PRACTICE

Integrity Action funded by Swiss Solidarity designed an innovative approach to enable members of affected communities to collect evidence and report on the progress of the reconstruction work carried out by two Swiss NGOs and their local partners, in the district of Sindhupalchowk. A customized smartphone app allowed 23 voluntary community monitors to report on problems that arise during the reconstruction work. The real-time citizen feedback collected was then openly accessible on internet <https://sindhupalcheck.developmentcheck.org>

Evidence was shared with relevant government officials and the National Reconstruction Authority each month. This assisted key duty bearers in understanding the problems faced by communities with a view to seeking to obtain timely resolution. Interview suggest that it has helped communities to understand their rights, it has informed them about how to make complaints, and it has also linked people to relevant government officials. Although several challenges were faced, such as; the training and equipping of community volunteers with the knowledge to carry out their roles, and encouraging them to do so on a voluntary basis

and delays in set up. Despite these challenges, people's elected representatives were positive about this initiative and agreed that it improved their awareness of the issues faced by the people, and assisted them in solve them.

It was refreshing to see examples of wider accountability and impact that went beyond organisations' own projects, and it is important that efforts are made to strengthen systems that benefit from wider consultation that go beyond the immediate boundaries of projects.

6.4 Recommendations

There is a need to continuously encourage people to make complaints, and to inform them of their right to complain as well as making them aware of the positive role that complaints can play in improving project quality and addressing issues of concern. More needs to be done to encourage complaints making by women, given the lower numbers of complaints received from women. Organisations must ensure adequate processes are in place for systematically including analysis of complaints within project decision making. This should include some kind of database, regular discussion of complaints within project meetings and inclusion of analysis within reporting.

Assessment and Planning

- Given the cultural constraints faced by people in Nepal, more culturally appropriate ways of encouraging people to complain should be explored in coordination with local partners and elected people's representatives. The use of alternative language to help people understand the importance of raising concerns should also be explored.
- Organisations should develop specific approaches to elicit complaints from vulnerable groups, such as additional consultations on their own. When projects target the most vulnerable members of a community, their lack of voice frequently makes it difficult for them to speak out and complain. It was felt these groups may require reassurance that complaints will not affect assistance in the future, this should be a part of the information they receive.

Implementation

- All organisations should ensure they use databases or a system of recording complaints to facilitate swift resolution and analysing of trends. Processes must be in place to ensure analysis is systematically feed into management decision making. There is a need to ensure complaints resolved in situ are documented by

field staff, or alternative ways are found of feeding such complaints into agreed processes.

- Processes should be rationalized, and resolution swiftly fed back to complainants; as delays in feedback on resolution of complaints can discourage people from complaining.
- Approaches need to be specifically designed to facilitate complaints making by women, given the lower numbers of complaints received from women; these may include women only meets or committees.

Monitoring

- The use of different approaches by the various groups in communities should be monitored to gain understanding of how they are used. Approaches that are rarely used could be replaced with those that are considered to be more effective, communities views on their utility should inform such decisions.



Section 7

Approaches used to respond to feedback

The CHS states the views of affected people should influence the content and implementation of project and projects should be adapted to changing needs and context. Feedback should be responded to in a timely way and that any complaints are resolved and the outcome fed back to the complainant; in order to both address specific problems, and to improve quality, there needs to be flexibility to adapt projects to accommodate changing needs and context, and for organisations to learn from the feedback they receive. This section analyses the way in which organisations response to feedback, and the challenges and barrier they face.

7.1 Organisational practice

The research found that organisations' responsiveness can be limited by a lack of procedural flexibility and agility, by time-consuming internal processes, by limitations in financial and human resources, and by a lack (or perceived lack) of donor flexibility. It is important for organisations to analyse the blockages and to understand the limits to their responsiveness to feedback as well as what flexibility exists. It is also important to understand when changes can be made and the ease with which different types of changes can be made.

GOOD PRACTICE

One database that the research team observed, had an automatic flagging mechanism, where messages were sent to managers automatically to inform them when deadlines for resolution had expired. This was considered to be good practice.

In order to monitor and ensure feedback is responded to appropriately, it needed to be effectively documented, three organisations used databases to ensure this. This allowed the status of specific complaints to be tracked, and an assessment of the length of time taken to resolve issues and feedback on resolutions. The approach permits analysis of the percentage of issues that are resolved and the number of complaints that are outstanding at any time. This assists the organisations to monitor their overall responsiveness and assess how long it is taking them to resolve concerns. Organisations have set themselves

target timeframes within which to resolve complaints which are set outlined in their policies. One database showed that at time that the research was conducted, 76% of issues that had been raised had been resolved within the target timeframe and 23.2% had taken longer to deal with.

Some organisations proactively monitored community views on their responsiveness through their M&E systems and as part of community surveys. As part of these exercises, people were asked whether they felt the organisation was responsive to community voices and feedback, and whether they felt their voices were listened to.

During interviews, staff gave examples of changes and adaptations that had been made to projects and plans as a result of feedback that had been received. Community members, committees and user groups were also able to articulate examples of suggestions they had made, requests for changes that had been proposed, or complaints that had led to modifications in activities and projects. Most of the examples related to small changes and minor adjustments to activities which can be summarised as follows;

- Changes to training locations or meeting times;
- Minor adjustments to budgets or costs of activities;
- Additions to training components;
- The addition of specific beneficiary groups to a project;
- Small revisions to construction plans and materials.

Committees or user groups were frequently responsible for decision-making about project activities and were able to make adjustments directly, such as purchasing goats instead of pigs, or exchanging a distributed item to a cash distribution. One user groups said they felt they were able to address feedback from members themselves and they had sufficient control of the budget to allow activities to be changed, or were able to raise additional funds from members.

7.2 Analysis of organisational performance

There were many examples given to the research team of minor changes or modifications that were made to projects, although it was difficult to find examples of more substantive changes having been made as a result of community feedback. There were also significant levels of feedback and complaints on specific issues such as beneficiary targeting that may indicate a need for more substantive changes to targeting approaches, that were not being addressed. Such feedback did lead to minor adjustments to those that received assistance at a household level.

Figure 9, The significant challenge posed by targeting and selection

One database showed that 445 SMS texts were received which raised concerns about beneficiary selection, out of a total of 950 texts received. Over 1,906 complaints about beneficiary selection were received through one organisation's suggestion box, out of a total of 2,360 messages received.

Making changes to a project was said to be fairly simple and quick from the perspective of SwS. They do give authority to the organisation to make minor change without having to ask an official modification to a project. Requests for major changes were said by SwS to be received infrequently. Instead, these tended to be incorporated into second phases of projects.

Although no international NGOs that participated in the research mentioned directly that funding deterred them from making changes, one manager indicated that changes were easier to make when the NGO was using its own funds, or in instances when there were no budget implications. It may have been perceived that changes were more difficult if there was a need for additional funds but the research found no evidence of this. Staff said it was easier to add activities rather than to remove them from projects. Small changes could be made at the field-level but authority for making change mostly lay with the budget holders and the international NGO project staff. The research team asked whether some of the orga-

nisations with larger management teams in the field had a more decentralised approach and greater authority to adapt projects at field level, which received some endorsement. It was widely agreed that gaining authority for changes from international NGO offices in Kathmandu took time and frequently led to delays.

The long chain of staff required to make a change to a project was often said to have restricted responsiveness and led to delays. This chain may extend from the SM who received the feedback, to the manager of the local partner, to the partner executive staff, to the international NGO district-level manager, and then possibly to the international NGO office in Kathmandu, depending on the scope of the changes.

Staff reported that it was more difficult to adapt and change activities that had been agreed in consultation with communities and other stakeholders at the design stage. They felt that in order to do this, wider consultation would be needed. They also said that once communities had been informed about activities, and if they had been advertised they were seen as being fixed. One staff member said to the research team, 'if it's already written, it can't change.'

The process of government authorisation of projects and activities also acted as a deterrent to making substantive changes once activities had been officially agreed. There was a reluctance to make changes once a project had been given the green light by the government.

7.3 Recommendations

There are many constraints that inhibit the responsiveness of organisations to adequately responding to feedback and complaints from communities. These are related to structures and processes, ways of working, budgets and funding. However, what is most important is that organisations look at the barriers to their responsiveness and seek to develop ways to overcome these wherever possible.

Staff need to be both responsive to feedback adapt activities quickly on the ground, and to escalate information within an organisation to allow more substantive changes to be made. Being accountable means more than making minor modifications to projects and activities; at times, more fundamental changes are required to ways of working. Moreover, given the greater proximity that local partners have to the point of impact of projects, it is suggested that there is a need for a more fundamental shift in power to allow greater authority to be given to local partners and field staff to make changes to activities.

The following recommendations are made in support of this:

Implementation

- Partnership agreements should give more authority to partners and their staff to adapt projects based on feedback received from communities.
- Both SwS and international NGOs should more clearly outline the flexibility that exists within their funding and budget systems for changes to be made in response to feedback.
- There is scope for wider use of systems to track resolution of complaints, three organisations that participated in the research used databases, and maybe could share their learning and tools more widely. Feedback to complainants about resolution of concerns is a key part of AAP and the CHS, and can benefit from more systematic documentation processes. There may be opportunities to link more closely with, or share learning with the government, or wider web-based approaches such as Sindhupalcheck.

- Committee and user groups should be given more responsibility to make changes to activities, whilst balancing the need for this to be fed back to project managers.

Monitoring

- Collection and analysis of unintended and negative outcomes should be a part of routine monitoring, and concerns should be discussed and shared with management.
- Organisations need to better understand, collect evidence and document the blockages to their responsiveness.





Section 8

Conclusions and recommendations

This section provides a conclusion on the various aspects of the report and makes recommendations for the strengthening of AAP to SwS partners and to SwS its work at the country and global level.

8.1 Conclusions

A variety of approaches had been developed to share different types of information with community's, do this, with some organisations choosing to use a number of different approaches at different times, others had a wide range of tools to select from, others focused on just one or two approaches which they used throughout the lifecycle of projects. Information sharing and consultation at the initial stages of project implementation was generally felt to be strong, with some gaps appearing at later stages.

Organisations worked with user groups, local partners and local social mobilisers to ensure participation of community groups in decision making. The level of inclusiveness and representation across communities was at times incomplete and there is scope for this to be better monitored so that gaps can be addressed as they are discovered.

Organisations emphasised the importance of using different methods to ensure they had consulted with all groups and most selected the most appropriate approaches for the target group and the project activities from a range of tools according to target group.

Organisations had developed mechanisms and processes to allow complaints and feedback to be made which frequently included means to collect and analyse concerns that were raised. This, at times fed into organisational management and reporting processes and was discussed within project and management meetings. Methods of recording and analysing complains could be strengthened by the use of databases within all organisations, or more systematic approaches.

Organisations were generally proactive in addressing complaints and in providing feedback to complainants. The research team collected evidence of changes being made to projects as a result of feedback and complaints from communities, although these most frequently comprised minor adaptations rather than substantive changes.

Challenges were observed in the ability of organisations to ensure that they consistently engaged women, and marginalised groups, particularly in the more remote areas and in communities of diverse ethnicity. This could be strengthened through greater advocacy to the government and a push for policy changes. It was also a challenge for organisations to formally and consistently document feedback that was given verbally to their staff, either during project monitoring visits, or over the phone. It is important that this feedback is documented along with that which is received through formal process and which is easier to document such as written feedback in order to ensure both can be addressed.

In Nepal, organisations face considerable challenge in overcoming the cultural reluctance to complain, or give negative feedback to organisations. This is an area which requires more work to be done to better understand the most appropriate way to ensure engagement with communities on both the successes and challenges of the assistance they are provided with.

Monitoring the relevance and effectiveness of different approaches of complaints and feedback and gauging the levels of community satisfaction with them was generally considered to be an area that requires improvement. Better use could have been made of the data that some

organisations collected for this purpose. Feedback should be proactively and regularly sought on AAP approaches to ensure they are achieving their purpose. Stronger monitoring, research and evaluation, is needed to establish the effectiveness and impact of different AAP activities and approaches. More investment should be made in rigorous data collection and analysis, based on consultation and feedback with communities, to build a robust body of evidence. A mix of both quantitative surveys that reveal 'what' is working well and what is not should be complemented with qualitative information to help to understand the 'why'.

AAP approaches involving direct contact with staff tended to be favoured by communities which includes face-to-face meetings with project staff and multi-stakeholder meetings. Both of these approaches permitted a level of real-time problem solving which was considered important. This preference underlines the important role played by strong, community-level social mobilisation staff. Although it was suggested by community members that greater use of social media and radio broadcast discussions could strengthen engagement with specific parts of communities, it remains important that a balance is found between new and old technologies and that direct communication with staff remains at the heart of AAP approaches.

There was a strong awareness and articulation by staff at all levels of the importance of working closely with community members, of providing information to them, consulting and listening to them and of empowering them and facilitating their participation in projects. Despite this, there were some aspects of AAP where the link between listening and responding was not routinely strong. Specifically, the link between receiving feedback and modifying projects based on community views was a weakness. It is essential that organisations understand the latitude they have to change projects and that wherever possible, these are made by staff and partners that have with the greatest proximity to communities. The barriers to achieving this within organisations needs to be better understood and addressed.

Despite the encouraging practice that was observed within projects, there is still scope to strengthen awareness of the key aspects of AAP, including at senior management level. Ultimately, a better understanding of CHS commitments, and targeted training and capacity building will put organisations in the best possible position to be responsive to the needs of those they are seeking to assist.

8.2 Recommendations for SwS partners in Nepal

Recommendations about how AAP approaches can be strengthened by SwS-funded partners in Nepal have been presented at the end of each section of this report. The key recommendations are highlighted below;

- AAP approaches could be better contextualised and tailored to meet the specific needs of target groups by addressing cultural issues, such as the reluctance to feedback negative issues.
- There is a need for a fundamental shift in the way in which some organisations view AAP, so they do not take an overly reductive, or mechanistic approach but incorporate all aspects of the CHS commitments related to AAP. This requires a greater emphasis being placed on training and capacity building which will require access to dedicated funding and staffing of AAP.
- For organisations to be truly accountable they must engage with all groups within a community. The inclusiveness of user groups is an area which requires continuing attention in order to ensure that women, marginalised groups and the most vulnerable have equal access to feedback and complaints mechanisms.
- The research found that while organisations are responsive to community feedback, there is a tendency to focus on minor modifications rather than substantive changes. The processes that organisations have in place to ensure that feedback is systematically considered in project design and implementation must be strengthened and the barriers that exist need to be better understood and addressed to the extent possible.
- The role of local partners, their authority and ability to respond to community views must be strengthened.
- All M&E staff, SM and project staff and managers should be trained in AAP, and a training program put in place to orientate existing and all new staff.

8.3 Recommendations for Swiss Solidarity

SwS is committed to working closely with its partners to strengthen AAP, both in Nepal and globally. There are opportunities to achieve this both in current and future programmes in Nepal. SwS can incentivise AAP and encourage their partners to listen to communities, seek and encourage feedback, and ensure it informs decision making. They can prioritise AAP in their proposal templates, develop minimum standards and strengthen partner practice by incorporating it in their monitor and reporting. They can incentivise good AAP practice by making resources available and proactively promote an approach that permits the flexibility that is required for organisations to adapt their programmes based on community feedback. SwS can play an important role in championing AAP in their responses, and can facilitate reflection and collective learning by sponsoring targeted research as they have done in Nepal. In order to achieve these transformational changes, the following recommendations are proposed;

Recommendation 1: Champion AAP in SwS-funded humanitarian responses

Findings from AAP research in successive humanitarian responses have shown the key role played by specialist AAP staff or 'champions' within a response; their deployment at the outset of a new response can play a crucial role in establishing individual agency and collective AAP systems in addition to supporting capacity building of local partners.

- SwS should support the deployment of specialist accountability staff to champion AAP within the initial weeks of a new humanitarian response, this could be through the funding of AAP champions within its partner organisations.
- SwS should consider supporting secondments, or funding an AAP expert within a response.

Recommendation 2: Foster a culture of AAP in how SwS works with its partners

Organisations AAP practice should be based on a thorough understanding of relevant CHS commitments and this should be clearly articulated by SwS partners at a strategic and operational level. To do this, SwS should do the following;

- Develop a set of minimum standards for AAP, that are based on the CHS and that are consistent with other minimum standards used by SwS.
- Ensure that all partner projects include a commitment to meeting AAP standards in the CHS.

- Require that partners identify AAP costs, activities and staff responsibilities as part of their proposals.
- Require partners to submit detailed AAP monitoring plans as part of their proposals.
- Play a strategic monitoring role against AAP commitments and use field visits to report against these.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen partner capacity building for AAP

While SwS partners have demonstrated a commitment to aspects of AAP and a level of competence, this is not across all aspects and is more variable for local partners. There is an opportunity for SwS to fund local capacity building for AAP at the initial stages of a response with local partners.

- A package of training materials could be gathered from existing CHS materials and disseminated to partners.
- SwS should consider initiating and supporting AAP training for local partners in any new responses that it funds. Alternatively, it could fund CHS training (and use CHS-accredited trainers).
- SwS should encourage and fund where necessary, orientation of new staff and partners at the commencement of a project, and this should be a part of proposals.

Recommendation 4: Spearhead collective AAP action in a humanitarian response

There are a growing number of examples of collective action on AAP, particularly in high profile humanitarian crises, however, these are less evident in crises lower profile emergencies. There is scope for SwS to target a specific crisis and through its funding with support from its members, launch a collective AAP approach for purposes of strengthening accountability across a response, or across its partners within a response but also to build institutional knowledge.

- Undertake a brief mapping of collective accountability approaches to inform the pilot including distilling lessons and experiences from the Sindhupalcheck project.
- Initiate discussions to identify a potential role for SwS in leading collective AAP action in an emergency in the future.
- Take preliminary actions to agree how funding could be ring-fenced explicitly in support of a collective AAP response.

Recommendation 5: Champion the flexibility required to modify programmes in response to community feedback

SwS should seek to position itself among its peer donors as an AAP champion and role model the flexibility that is required for organisations to be responsive to community feedback. In support of this, it should proactively engage partners in discussions about the importance of adapting projects based on beneficiary feedback throughout the project cycle.

- SwS should promote itself as an example for good AAP practice among the donor community, its partners and benefactors.
- SwS should examine its systems to ensure that they possess the flexibility required for organisations to easily and swiftly modify programmes to meet the changing needs of communities.
- SwS should seek to ensure that its partners have processes in place to routinely elicit feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of its programmes.
- Ensure organisations have adequate resources for AAP; funding for specific activities, dedicated staff and structures and ensure processes are in place
- Where AAP monitoring systems provide evidence of the need for changes to be made in programme approaches or implementation, there should be a streamlined process in place to quickly authorise these.
- SwS should develop its expertise within the AAP sector, or engage with experts specialising in AAP to develop its own capacity

Recommendation 6: Continue to promote learning and practical action on AAP in Nepal

SwS has initiated a process of reflection and learning on AAP in Nepal which provides an important foundation for further work in the future. The recommendations outlined earlier in this report for partners should be promoted with additional funding being made available in order to continue to strengthen performance;

- SwS should lead a follow-up set of learning workshops in order to share learning from the review and to discuss the priorities for strengthening partner AAP practice
- There is scope for SwS to support capacity building and training for partner staff in Nepal in areas that have been highlighted in this report as weak.

- As new proposals are prepared, it should be mandatory for partners to explain how they will implement the lessons outlined in this report. They should be encouraged to include dedicated funding and resources for AAP activities and staffing, and to implement capacity building and awareness raising of AAP.

Annex 1

Summary of approaches used for communicating with communities

	DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS / LIMITATIONS	MOST EFFECTIVE ROLE
INFORMATION BOARDS	Boards placed at project and activity sites, containing basic organisation, accountability and project details. Often including; project timeframes, activities, contact details of office, donor and budget details.	<p>Good for initial introduction of the project</p> <p>Sustainability: people can come over and over to read</p> <p>Transparency, ensures everyone knows and can check basic information</p> <p>People knew they could get the number if they needed to contact staff-and get someone to read it for them if they couldn't read</p>	<p>Limited use by communities who cannot read and write</p> <p>Puts marginalised and lower-caste community at a disadvantage</p> <p>Although people were aware of the posters, some couldn't say what was written on it</p> <p>People said they forget the details, and numbers, having seen it</p> <p>Less popular with women, many of who said they didn't know what was on the posters</p>	<p>Providing basic information at the start of the project</p> <p>To cross check contact details and mobile numbers throughout the project</p> <p>Good for transparency and profile</p>
PICTORIAL POSTERS	<p>Detailed pictorial posters of key project details, used to raise awareness of specific project information, and contacting contact details and complaints mechanisms, with details of how to contact staff. These were used in key locations or given out to house holders</p> <p>Provided at community's request, as wanted something to remind them of information, following a training for example</p>	<p>Pictorial posters were seen as popular for people who cannot read and write- especially for women and marginalised groups</p> <p>Posters distributed to households allows beneficiaries to consult it whenever feasible</p> <p>Seen as useful to reinforce objectives of activities and playing a role in accountability by reducing corruption and holding organisation to account</p> <p>Seen as a constant reminder of information and details</p>	<p>Needed to be strong to last</p>	<p>Posters for sustained engagement of the beneficiaries with the project and constant reminder of important information</p> <p>Good for illiterate people and popular with women</p> <p>Valued and accessible at the household level, by everyone in the house</p>
FLEXES (HEAVY DUTY REUSABLE POSTERS)	<p>Flexes were hung up before the start of an activity describing the project's main objective and the everyday agenda along with funds used for that particular activity. Some included details of refreshment cost or room hire cost</p> <p>Used at trainings to detail the activities, training topics, room hire cost, food and accommodation allowances, stationary, transportation, staff names and timings</p> <p>Used to promote accountability; in one example it stated 'if you have complaints or suggestions contact us on this numbers anonymously and you will be informed of resolution'</p> <p>Staff in one organisation were mandated to use/display within all activities.</p>	<p>Reinforces the information that the project intends to convey</p> <p>People stated it builds trust if funds used are clearly stated in the flex</p> <p>Good for accountability and transparency, clear how everyone is being treated., said to reduce rumours about what people were receiving</p> <p>Information was read out at start for those who couldn't read. Used as a tool to clarify key information at start of activity</p>	<p>The use of flexes less effective when used in communities with a lesser literacy rate</p> <p>Created a distraction, when controversial information or costs of refreshments are constant displayed and the first thing that is discussed in meetings</p> <p>Risks overwhelming people with information that provides limited benefit to them</p>	<p>Throughout the project and read at start of activities</p> <p>Good for illiterate people</p>

	DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS / LIMITATIONS	MOST EFFECTIVE ROLE
FLIERS/ BUSINESS CARDS/VISITING CARDS/POCKET CALENDARS	Given out at house hold level with writing and pictures, detailing key project information, contact details and ways of complaining contacting organisation. In one example a flier said 'to make our work effective, and quality and transparent you suggestions are important'	Useful for households to keep as reference, larger pictorial fliers valuable to those who couldn't read. Calendar useful as serviced a second purpose.	Literacy required Flier was intended for household to keep, but those seen were very thin paper and would not last	Useful for reference at household level
RADIO INFORMATION -JINGLES	Jingles developed to raise awareness, give specific project related information, such as 'earthquake resistant housing' and to give details of a project and activities such as; training content, agency contacts and timings? Used to advertise activities and said to encourage participation	In theory, huge coverage Doesn't discriminate between people who can and cannot read Efficient for awareness-related activities Conveying the core objective of programs (perhaps builds trust over the community). Can be seen as official, adding authority to information if its seen to be from a trusted radio source Transparency, everyone one, project beneficiaries and non-can receive the same information	The use of radio itself has been declining as communities prefer TV Elderly men and women said they listen more to the radio, than young generations Entertainment programs preferred more than informative Radio information not always absorbed, people said 'it played in the background and came in one ear and then left' especially if people were busy Organisations tended to follow up with door to door visits to ensure information was understood-not considered to be an effective stand-alone tool Some people / community do not understand the Nepali language properly. Timing is always an issue.	At the start of the project to advertise but also continuous jingles help keep beneficiaries interest on the project Useful in reaching a wide audience with information, and promoting attendance at training, or participation in a project Seen to be very effective in recruiting Masons for training.
RADIO PROGRAMS WITH COMMUNITY VOICES	There were several models used; > Journalists (from outside) would go and visit talk with the beneficiaries in the community over a period of several days (facilitated by the organisation). They would ask for issues and suggestions from the community, to be included in the show. Issues would occasionally also be brought to government officials (locally or in Kathmandu) or any other groups to respond to the issues or complains raised by the beneficiaries. One agency also stated they followed this up with advocacy on certain issues with the government > Journalist from local community would constantly ask community members what issues to discuss on the radio, and use this to design content of shows and provide relevant information > Programmes produced in bulk by Kathmandu based team, with limited local input	Beneficiaries are able to share their experiences with general listeners Hearing local voices was said to encourages people from other communities to raise their issues, suggestions and complaints and participation in projects Wider impact than agencies own accountability and projects Creates greater accountability and potential resolution if the show brings in authorities to respond to the issues raised by the community Acts as effective way for feedback on issues and some 2-way communication, although this was limited	Difficult for agencies to follow up resolutions outside of scope of their project and with wider stakeholders Information needed to be current and regular consultation with communities required Took multiple visits to communities to allow effective consultation (3days)-this did not always occur with some programmes being produced from Kathmandu Didn't always allow illicit feedback on project activities and levels of satisfaction. Often consultation by journalists was only to ask community suggestions for topics the programme should cover Language problem	Works best after first few weeks of the projects to get the issues and suggestions Can play a greater role in feedback and 2-way communication Can play a role in resolution and beyond project activities and local stakeholders Difficult to monitor use and who gets information
SUGGESTION BOXES	Boxes placed at project sites and opened jointly by organisations and groups from the community, or user groups. Open every 2-4 weeks.	Safe, confidential Useful for groups within the community that preferred to write, seen as more formal/traditional Useful in rural locations or less accessible locations Said to have been used for group feedback, when one writer documents a groups complains and submits them Seen as useful for training-when present throughout training series	Not collected regularly led to slower redress Labour intensive for NGO staff and difficult to check regularly People don't always write address, or contact details, so can't always be used for 2-way communication	Used by organisations at most of the project sites, but stated not to be used very much by beneficiaries for feedback Some people prefer to write Confidential and stated these were useful for confidential and sensitive issues

	DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS / LIMITATIONS	MOST EFFECTIVE ROLE
COMMUNITY MEETINGS	<p>The models most frequently used were;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Multi stakeholder meetings involving local Government representatives, local partner and INGO staff and community members. These linked to the government processes > Inception meetings to provided information on a project and for initial consultation > Meetings with Government representatives to introduce the project 	<p>Often held at start of the project to provided information about activities, to clarify needs and ask for feedback on activities and plans</p> <p>Useful for obtaining feedback and redress, from a wide group at one time</p> <p>Seen as useful for community to hear the views of others and gain deeper level of clarify on project activities. Listening and being a part of the wider group was felt to be important, even if participants weren't always able to speak</p> <p>Seen as useful to raise concerns publically and know what other concerns are- especially for women who felt unable to speak out. Seen as a trigger for follow up discussion amongst community members 'they knew others had the same information, or concerns so could then discuss with them Immediate response possible</p>	<p>Some women stated they found it difficult to speak out in large group with unknown men present</p> <p>Several agencies found the meeting difficult to manage, especially if complaints were voiced to government officials</p> <p>Success depended on personalities involved and facilitation skills of agency Some people preferred face to face intimacy and privacy in raising issues</p> <p>Not useful for confidential issues, and some community members said they didn't like to complain publically Difficult for marginalised groups, women and less confident people</p> <p>A limited number of confident people spoke out</p>	<p>Useful to clarify information at start and provide community wide information, to multi stakeholders</p> <p>Used also to obtain information on needs and priorities, in early stage</p> <p>Useful for obtaining feedback and redress form multiple stakeholders Women appreciated opportunity to listen to discussions and other peoples views</p>
HELP DESK AT DISTRIBUTION	<p>Desks manned by organisation staff at site of activity or training for its duration. Used to provided information, clarify issues, refer people to stakeholders and those able to provide redress and to collect feedback-often activity related.</p>	<p>Located at specific activity site, so very targeted information and feedback, seen to be useful when large numbers of people gather for an activity and a good way of providing information to large numbers and to free up time of project staff doing the activity. Seen as useful way of referring people to other services</p>	<p>Linked to intervention, not permanently in location</p>	<p>Distribution at initial response stage, but also used during in shelter and WASH distributions and at trainings Good for immediate resolution and information</p>
MOBILE PHONE NUMBERS FOR STAFF, TOLL FREE NUMBERS AND HELP LINES	<p>Staff called several members of the community directly to give information about meetings and timings. The information was passed on to other members of the community. This was often through user groups or committee members, or leaders. Organisations advertised staff contact numbers, or a hotline number and in some instances a toll free number. These were manned within advertised times by staff daily.</p>	<p>Popular for relaying project activity details such as; timings and locations of meetings, and changes in planning</p> <p>Used to call before a household visit in some projects Most people aware of existence on a number and how to find it, where it was advertised Toll free said by community to be used more often for positive feedback, suggestions, adjustments rather than complaints-check analysis</p>	<p>Cost and confidentially said to be a deterrent to using hotlines to make complaints</p> <p>Usually men were informed in this way, information was said to not always be passed on to marginalized groups or women-dependending on inclusiveness of structure</p>	<p>Very useful tool for provision of information, answering questions and clarifying information. Good for 2-way communication, details could be logged and caller contacted. Resolutions could be easily fed back. Useful through project, but especially at time of main activities</p> <p>Community members called local partners for information and to ask questions-not used much to call INGO or Kathmandu they said-or to complain</p> <p>Examples of use to request minor project changes, such as activities, timings, payments etc.</p>

	DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS / LIMITATIONS	MOST EFFECTIVE ROLE
DOOR TO DOOR VISITS BY PROJECT STAFF	<p>Organisation staff visited for formal and informal door to door, household level visits. These included monitoring and technical visits and informal home visits, at regular intervals. They were carried out by;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Technical/sector staff > Project managers and M and E staff for monitoring purposes > Social Mobilizers (SMs) usually partner staff, living locally on within community and speaking local language <p>Sometimes pamphlets and fliers were given out at the same time to reinforce information</p>	<p>House hold visits were preferred by some women, allowed detailed information discussion</p> <p>Used initially to obtain data for needs assessment and provide initial project detail</p> <p>Used to document feedback (on record form and note book</p> <p>Used to deal on the spot with issues and seek immediate resolution</p> <p>Social mobilisers were always present in the field in some projects, allowing continuous information exchange and feedback, within their responsibilities (not technical)</p> <p>Many monitoring visits and surveys included an element of AAP</p>	<p>Not always considered to be the right staff providing the right information. Some people felt they wanted more visits from technical staff to clarify technical information</p> <p>Could lead to resolutions if stakeholders not present, some people felt they were just told 'to take it up with Government'</p> <p>Some women said they preferred to speak to women</p>	<p>Used throughout project, but important for information provision following a less targeted approach, as it allowed individual and households to clarify and ask questions</p>
TV PROGRAMS	<p>Only used in 1 example, largely to provide information on a shelter construction project. Producers visited communities and undertook a series of interviews asking community members of their experiences of being involved in the project.</p>	<p>Allowed for experiences of a communities to be disseminated widely</p> <p>Strong way of disseminating information beyond project area</p> <p>Popular and peoples said they watched for entertainment-unclear how much information is passed</p>	<p>A block of programmes were made at once by the producer, so not always current</p> <p>Limited example of raising or redress of issues. Project at early stage and this may be developed.</p> <p>Not targeted to a geographic area</p> <p>Not clear how much people watch information</p>	<p>In theory could be used 2-way communication and redress</p> <p>Some organisations have experience of discussion shows on issues, live TV shows, but not seen on projects visited. Several organisations said they had considered it and discussed with partners but decided not appropriate</p>
NOTE BOOK STICKERS	<p>Stickers with key information on, aimed at children and adults to stick on books. Larger ones for key sites like water tanks</p>	<p>Visual and popular for target group</p>		<p>Useful for key information and longevity</p>
MEETINGS WITH STAFF	<p>Both informal and formal meetings occurred at project sites and informally in partner office depending on office location and accessibility</p> <p>These tended to be targeted to beneficiary groups such as women, user groups and children</p> <p>Very frequent at certain stages of activities 3-4 a mth</p>	<p>Used initially to provide project information, to assess needs and ask preferences and activity priorities.</p> <p>Used for further information provision and clarification of information, wider community meetings and some tailored to need and target groups.</p> <p>Allowed for detailed explanations to be given.</p>	<p>Some women said they only attended if their husbands were absent</p> <p>Some women said they preferred to speak one on one, rather than in a meeting, this sometimes depended on whether there were men present (particular unknown men)</p>	<p>Allowed for information provision, 2-way communication and feedback, limited complains raised</p> <p>Women largely saw these forums as information provision, rather than an opportunity to provide feedback</p>
NEIGHBOURS, FAMILY AND KEY COMMUNITY MEMBERS	<p>Neighbours, friends and family members and key members of the community, such as teachers passing on information</p>	<p>Considered to be important source of information for women, especially the role of their husbands in providing information</p> <p>Men stated the importance of teachers in providing information, especially in the parent teacher meetings</p> <p>Women who attended the meetings shared it with those who didn't attend.</p>	<p>Challenge of information being passed on to organisations and rumours and inaccurate information being generated</p>	<p>The role of men in representing women was mentioned, as was the role of user groups members, political representatives in passing information to wider community members</p>
VISITS TO PARTNER OFFICE	<p>Visits to partner office and staff</p>	<p>Some men and women said they visited the office for information and to ask questions</p>	<p>Many locations are accessible</p>	<p>Depends on accessibility and location of office and relationship with partners, some communities had long standing relationships, and were able to call into the office</p>

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