IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

The essential linkages between Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

Accountability to affected populations is an active commitment to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist.

Taking Account

Giving affected people influence over decision making in a way that accounts for the diversity of communities, and allows the views of the most vulnerable/at-risk to be equally considered

- Intervention strategies based on affected population needs and priorities, not capacities of agencies
- Individual / collective Feedback approaches
- "Closing the loop" : Systems able to adapt to collected feedback and modify programs accordingly, and report back to affected population

Giving Account

Transparency and effectively sharing information with communities

- Communication with Communities
- Transparent cluster decisions
- Accessible formats
- Transparent beneficiary selection criteria
- Information on services/assistance

Being Held to Account

Giving others the opportunity to assess and if appropriate sanction your actions.

- Individual/ Collective Complaints mechanisms
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation
- Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

5 Commitments to Accountability to Affected Population:

Accountability is one of the three pillars of the Transformative Agenda and the IASC principles, committed to creating a system-wide "culture of accountability" by endorsing these 5 commitments :

Leadership/Governance: Demonstrate commitment by ensuring AAP is integrated into country strategies, programme proposals, monitoring and evaluations, recruitment, staff inductions, trainings and performance management, partnership agreements, and highlighted in reporting.

Transparency: Provide accessible and timely information on organizational procedures, structures and processes that affect them to ensure that they can make informed decisions and choices, and facilitate a dialogue between an organisation and its affected populations over information provision.

Feedback and complaints: Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming, ensuring that feedback and complaints mechanisms are streamlined, appropriate and robust enough to deal with (communicate, receive, process, respond to and learn from) complaints about breaches in policy and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

Participation: Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them through the establishment of clear guidelines and practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalised and affected are represented and have influence.

Design, monitoring and evaluation: Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programmes with the involvement of affected populations, feeding learning back into the organisation on an on-going basis and reporting on the results of the process.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. **IASC Principals** are the heads of all **IASC** member agencies or their representatives. The "**Transformative Agenda**" is an initiative undertaken within the IASC since Dec. 2010 to make improvements to how the international humanitarian system responds to crises

Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of affected community members by anyone associated with the provision of aid constitutes one of the most serious breaches of accountability. It frequently occurs when the essential needs of those most at-risk in communities are not adequately met. Issues of lack of accountability and of sexual exploitation and abuse are derived from asymmetries of power. It is also a serious protection concern and erodes the confidence and trust of affected communities and the host country in all those providing assistance.

- Sexual exploitation and abuse constitute acts of serious misconduct and are therefore grounds for disciplinary measures, including summary dismissal
- Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or of consent locally, and mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence
- Exchange of money, employment, goods or services, including assistance that is due to beneficiaries, for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour, is prohibited
- Sexual relationships between UN staff and beneficiaries are strongly discouraged
- UN staff are obliged to report via established reporting mechanisms any concern or suspicion regarding sexual exploitation and abuse by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not and whether or not within the UN system
- UN staff, especially managers at all levels, are obliged to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse

UN Secretary-General's bulletin Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse 2003.

Sexual exploitation is defined as "any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another".

Sexual abuse is defined as "the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions".

It is essential to situate the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in conjunction with our commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations.

An illustration at operational level :

Field based complaints mechanisms, managed by individual agencies or collectively are often designed to focus either on accountability of the response, or to deal with cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. However, they might receive both types of complaints

- Complaints related to the quality and accountability of the response, (e.g. issues of beneficiaries selection, logistic, protection, security, complaints on fraud and corruption)
- Complaints related to sexual exploitation and abuse

Field based complaints mechanisms work if the affected population trusts that an adequate answer will be brought to any concerns raised.
We need therefore to be prepared and ensure that :

- complaints on the quality of the response are dealt with in an accountable manner by the respective agencies
- complaints related to sexual exploitation and abuse are dealt with appropriately

If only one type of complaint is dealt with properly, the trust in the whole complaints system might be at risk.

The IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse offers a helpdesk service to share information and best practice

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