Oxfam GB
Accountability starter pack

Oxfam

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Purpose of this pack

This guide is for those staff who would like to learn more about how to implement activities that are accountable to people and communities. It is primarily aimed at country-level staff responsible for implementing development or humanitarian projects and programmes.

The pack begins with an introduction to Oxfam GB's approach to accountability. This is followed by Oxfam International's Accountability Matrix. The Matrix shows the commitments to accountability found within Oxfam International's Programme Standards, and the different levels programmes can achieve in each area. Following this is an explanation of Oxfam GB's Minimum Standards on Accountability.

The rest of the pack is divided into four sections - one for each of the four Standards that Oxfam GB is focussing on. For each Standard, there is a brief explanation as to why this Standard is important, then some 'How-To' Guidelines and a Good Practice example from one of Oxfam's programmes. We have also added an extra section on how to improve greater financial transparency as we have had so many requests for guidance specifically on this.

This guide is just the beginning. There are lots more resources available to help you implement accountability. If you can access the intranet then please have a look at our page on Accountability: http://intranet.oxfam.org.uk/programme/pm/accountability   If you can't access the internet then please get in touch with either Yo Winder or Lucy Heaven Taylor and we can discuss what might be appropriate and send it to you.

We welcome your feedback – please help us improve our support to you.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In our work to overcome global poverty, it is essential that Oxfam is accountable to the people whose lives we seek to improve and to the organisations and individuals whose support makes this possible. We cannot expect either group to take us at our word that Oxfam 'does the right thing' – we need to demonstrate this in every aspect of our work.

Accountability lies at the core of Oxfam's values: accountability, empowerment and inclusiveness. In our humanitarian, development and campaigning work, we strive to help people in poverty to know and demand their rights, and to hold to account those in power (including ourselves and other NGOs, as well as employers, landowners, local and national governments, etc). For Oxfam to call for greater accountability from others, we must be accountable ourselves.

Oxfam GB is primarily accountable to women and men living in poverty but we take our accountability to all stakeholders seriously and continuously strive to balance the needs of different stakeholders. Besides women and men living in poverty our stakeholders include: donors; supporters; partners and allies; staff volunteers and the wider public; the individuals and institutions that we seek to influence through our advocacy and campaigning work; other Oxfam affiliates and the regulatory bodies in the UK and in countries where we operate.

We believe that by being more accountable to communities, we can have higher quality programmes and more sustainable impact. We strive to promote the participation of people and communities in programme identification, planning and delivery – ensuring that decisions about how we use our resources are shaped by the priorities of women and men living in poverty.

Oxfam GB's definition of accountability is:
Accountability is the process through which an organisation balances the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making and activities, and delivers against this commitment. Accountability is based on four dimensions - transparency, feedback mechanisms, participation and learning and evaluation - that allow the organisation to give account to, take account of and be held to account by stakeholders.

The principles that underpin our ability to be accountable are:
We hold ourselves accountable to people living in poverty but we take our accountability to all stakeholders seriously and continuously strive to balance their different needs. Increased accountability will be achieved and demonstrated through respectful and responsible attitudes, appropriate systems and strong leadership.

Our objectives for the three year period 2010 - 2013 are:

Transparency: We will ensure the people affected by our programmes have access to all relevant information, in time and in accessible form, in order that they can hold us to account.

Feedback: We will ensure that appropriate and accessible channels exist so that people affected by our programmes are increasingly able to give us feedback.

Participation: We will enable people to be involved in decision-making and implementation of all aspects of our work.

Monitoring and Effectiveness: We will ensure that our programmes are judged by those directly affected by them, as having a positive impact on their lives.

MATRIX – ACCOUNTABILITY TO PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

What is it?

This matrix comes from the Oxfam International Programme Standards and the self assessment exercise to measure adherence to those standards. You may have seen it before. It is based on field practice and is a useful reminder / gauge of the different dimensions that contribute to increased accountability and the levels that can be achieved by country, programme or project teams.

Dimensions	Level 1	Level 2
Transparency Programme Standard 11	Limited project[1] information is shared in an ad hoc manner with stakeholders[2]. Most information is provided verbally and/ or informally. It is generally provided at the beginning of the project and may not be updated.	**[3]Detailed project information is made publicly available: basic information about who Oxfam is, what we do, how we do it, who we work with, who funds us and basic information about project budget and activities. Methods for sharing information are chosen by project staff and/or partners.**
Feedback Programme Standard 11	No formal feedback of complaints mechanisms are in place.	Stakeholders are informed of their right to give feedback about projects, to make complaints and are offered at least one way to do both. Project staff ask for information feedback from stakeholders.
Participation Programme Standard 11	Stakeholders are informed about the project. Plans are discussed with key informants in the community, who are taken as representative of the full community. There is limited analysis of who holds authority in the local community and how.	Stakeholders are consulted about project plans. They provide information which project staff use to make key decisions about their work, at all stages of the project cycle. Women and men are consulted separately, and main social groupings in the community are identified, including the most marginalised.
MEL Programme Standard 10	Monitoring data is collected from partners. Feedback on what is done with this information is ad hoc.	Monitoring data is collected from partners and communities. Partners and communities are consulted in evaluations. Programme/project has formal mechanisms in place to communicate findings back to partners and communities.
Dear OGB colleagues - building mutually respectful relationships - a great OI addition to how we define our accountability!		
Relationships Programme Standard 11	Project staff understand that respect for stakeholders is important but are unsure how to strengthen these relationships.	Project staff are always polite and patient with stakeholders and try to understand local social expectations, and mostly speak local language(s). However staff don't have much time to devote to this challenge.
Another great OI addition - Please note that some of the codes outlined in the footnote are only applicable to humanitarian responses		
Standards Programme Standard 11	Project team is not aware of the international standards or codes that Oxfam is signed up to	Relevant international standards or codes that Oxfam is signed up to, are clearly referenced in the project approach, and communicated to stakeholders.

1. The matrix focuses on project level activities but can, equally, be applied at a programme level.
2. For the purpose of this document 'stakeholders' refer to people, communities and partners with whom Oxfam is working.
3. Bold text indicates that this is the OGB Minimum Standard for this particular dimension.

The majority of this Starter Pack will concentrate on the first four dimensions of accountability in the matrix. The fifth dimension has recently been added as a result of additional thinking as we go through SMS (Single Management Structure) and come together as one Oxfam. Guidance and good practice on this dimension will be added as we work together on improving our practice and accountability in being a good partner.

Level 3	Level 4
Detailed information about Oxfam, the partner and the project, including budgetary information and M&E reports are made available in appropriate local languages using methods that are easy for stakeholders to access: this information is regularly updated. A public annual report of Oxfam's work in country is available in hard copies in all country offices.	Full project and financial information is made available in ways that are easily accessible for all stakeholders. Project staff negotiate how best to share project information about objectives, budget, progress and complaints-handling procedures with stakeholders: in ways that are relevant, accessible and appropriate to them. MEL findings are fed back and reviewed with stakeholders.
Project has formal feedback and complaints mechanisms in place; actively encourages stakeholders to give feedback and make complaints; and records all feedback and complaints. Feedback and complaints always receive a response. Project demonstrably seeks continuous improvement in the quality and use of the complaints mechanisms.	Feedback and complaints systems are designed with stakeholders, building on respected local ways of giving feedback. Systems encourage the most marginalised to respond and are comprehensive. Feedback and complaints always receive a response. Trends are monitored and learning is fed to the wider organisation. Project demonstrably seeks continuous improvement in the quality and use of complaints mechanism.
Decisions are made jointly by project staff, with stakeholders consulted about plans. Stakeholders regularly provide information that project staff use to make key decisions about their work, at all stages of the project cycle. Women and men are consulted separately, and teams ensure main social groupings in the community are identified and their voices heard.	Decisions are made jointly by project staff and stakeholders. Stakeholders contribute equally in making key decisions about the project, throughout the entire cycle, including planning the budget. Project staff make sure they work with individuals and organisations who truly represent the interests of different social groups. It is clear that Oxfam's projects are influenced by partners and communities where Oxfam works.
Communities and partners are consulted on the development of appropriate outcome indicators. Capacity of partners and communities is built to undertake basic monitoring activities themselves. Findings are reviewed regularly with community.	Communities and partners participate in decisions about what to monitor and evaluate in a programme/project, helping to define the indicators of success. Findings are reviewed regularly with community. Changes to the project are jointly discussed and agreed. Community and partners are important judges of both what we do and how we do it; the MEL system empowers stakeholders.
Dear OGB colleagues - building mutually respectful relationships - a great OI addition to how we define our accountability!	
Programmes help stakeholders build up their self-confidence and self-respect. Project staff aim to help local people to analyse and tackle their own issues in their own ways. Formal mechanisms exist to support this aspiration.	Programme actively promotes dialogue and reflection between project staff and stakeholders on each others' experience. By working together new options for action are developed without ideas being unilaterally imposed. Formal mechanisms support this aspiration and are regularly reviewed and adapted jointly by project staff and stakeholders.
Another great OI addition - Please note that some of the codes outlined in the footnote are only applicable to humanitarian responses.	
Relevant international standards or codes that Oxfam is signed up to are clearly referenced in the project activities, and a clear process to measure performance against these standards is set out. Review and reflection on performance is done ad hoc	Relevant international standards or codes that Oxfam is signed up to demonstrably inform project design and delivery. Clear processes for measuring and reflecting on performance against these standards exist, and are used to develop plans to improve future practice.

OXFAM GB'S PROGRAMME/
PROJECT ACCOUNTABILITY MINIMUM STANDARDS

What is it?

Whilst Oxfam as a whole uses the matrix on the previous pages to demonstrate various possible levels of accountability, Oxfam GB requires that certain minimum standards are met by the programmes and projects it is responsible for. This simple, one-page description of the Minimum Standards for Accountability required by Oxfam GB aims to make clear what these standards are.

Transparency

Programmes and projects must make available the following information to partners/communities:

- who we are, what we do, how we do it, who we work with, relevant project and programme information such as expenditure specific to that community and progress reports, how to give feedback and make a complaint.

Participation

Programmes and projects must have mechanisms that ensure partners and communities are involved in decision-making about (a) what the project will achieve and (b) how this is to be done.

Feedback

Programmes and projects must have feedback mechanisms that have been discussed and agreed with people affected by the project or programme; and are capable of dealing with positive and negative feedback in addition to complaints.

Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning

Programmes and project design and implementation must ensure that processes are in place which actively involve stakeholders in measuring, learning from and sharing the extent to which we have met partner and community expectations

1. Transparency

Minimum Standard

Programmes and projects must make available the following information to partners/communities: who we are, what we do, how we do it, who we work with, relevant project and programme information such as expenditure specific to that community and progress reports, and how to give feedback and make a complaint.

Why?

Providing information to beneficiaries and communities is essential for meaningful participation. It also allows communities to hold us to account – if we share our commitments with them, this enables people to check whether we are meeting them. Our commitments to communities are two-fold: we commit to doing what we said we'd do and we commit to behaving in a way that is polite, respectful and upholds people's dignity. Both are equally important.

Sharing information in ways agreed with the community potentially enables them to influence how the project is implemented. If people know what to expect then they will know when they are not getting it, and can tell us. This not only upholds our commitment to transparency, but improves project efficiency - we have had several cases of communities stopping fraudulent practice (in our staff, partners, or others) because they felt empowered enough to let us know that they were not receiving the services they knew they were meant to receive.

Because we know that everybody finds it particularly difficult, in the annexe you will find information focussing on sharing financial information with partners and communities which is part of Oxfam GB's Minimum Standard on transparency.

GUIDELINES

1. Information for partners and communities must be:

• Accessible – in the right language and the right format. This could be written, verbal, or in pictures – or anything else you and the community decide. It must be free of jargon and acronyms! The more ways you are able to provide information the more people you will reach.

• Engaging – wherever possible it should engage the attention of the recipients.

• Timely – it should be current and updated regularly.

• Safe – it must not mislead or cause harm to communities, partners, Oxfam GB or others, and it must uphold the dignity of all.

• Verified – accurate, consistent, and validated.

• Accountable – give users an opportunity to feedback what kind of information they want and how they want it as well as evaluate whether the information provided met both their needs and the above criteria.

2. Designing the best information in the best way(s):
Firstly:
Stakeholder mapping and analysis - who are you wishing to communicate with, what information do they need - what do they know, what do they need to know?

Secondly:
Together with the community, identify the most appropriate formats for communicating the right information to the people who need to receive it. Not everybody will want the same things in the same way. Your choices for communication methods could include, but are not limited to the following: community meetings; community notice boards; loud speaker; drama; leaflets and brochures; posters; personal meetings; phone calls; local radio/tv etc. Don't forget that vulnerable and marginalised groups are not likely to come forward easily to give their opinions - you will have to go to them to make sure they are heard.

Thirdly:
Make a communications plan, ensure that it is included within your project workplan and budget.

Fourthly: Develop appropriate materials as required; make special efforts to ensure that all translations are well done and work with community representatives to ensure that the intended message is what is understood and the formats are appropriate.

Lastly:
Deliver your plan and continually check that it is working – is the right information getting to the people who need it?

3. The following is the minimum information that you need to share with communities (and partners)

Basic information
1 Background information about Oxfam GB
2 Names and contact details of Oxfam GB and all key staff involved with the project
3 Details of the current project

Reports on project implementation
4 Regular accessible reports on project performance
5 Regular accessible appropriate financial reports - see annexe for support on this
6 Information about significant project changes

Opportunities for involvement
7 Dates and locations of key participation events
8 Encourage and details for making comments or suggestions
9 Details of how to make complaints about Oxfam GB's project of staff behaviour

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

As part of the ECB (Emergency Capacity Building) project, Oxfam GB designed a series of communication materials to be used in communities. The ECB is a network of NGOs who work together to improve the speed, quality, and effectiveness of the humanitarian community to save lives, improve welfare, and protect the rights of people in emergency situations.

Testing images with community in Bangladesh. Photo: ECB project

The aim of the project was to produce templates of posters that would advise the community of what they should expect from the NGOs, and encourage them to hold us to account. The posters bore a set of messages such as 'We want to make improvements – tell us what you think about the project' and 'people have a right to be involved in [the NGO] response'.

Research was undertaken to decide how best to communicate these concepts to the community. It was decided that the posters should be designed together with the community, to produce materials that would resonate with them. As a pilot, Oxfam and the ECB developed posters in six countries – Bangladesh, Bolivia, Peru, Kenya, Lebanon and Myanmar. These countries were selected to provide a wide perspective from different regions.

Project staff conducted Focus Group discussions with disaster-affected communities, together with a local artist. The Focus Groups and the artist developed images that they felt best communicated the poster's message. Posters were subsequently produced and then field tested where possible to check the images were effective.

The posters were then translated into six languages – English, Spanish, French, Bangla, Burmese and Arabic. They are available to download on the ECB website. The idea is that agencies can adapt the posters to their own context, and add agency logos, office addresses and contact numbers so communities can ask questions and provide feedback. Ideally, agencies in a response would do this jointly. Guidelines are provided to help agencies with adapting the images and translating the text.

There were many learning points from the project. The team had hoped to keep written words to a minimum, so that posters were accessible to communities without a writing culture – however they found that at least a basic written message was necessary. They also discovered that images are very context specific – how communities view themselves varies from location to location, but also in urban and rural contexts. The posters on their own do not amount to an accountable response, but used as part of a participatory approach, they can prove useful in letting communities know that we want to work together with them in a humanitarian response.

For more information, visit www.ecbproject.org
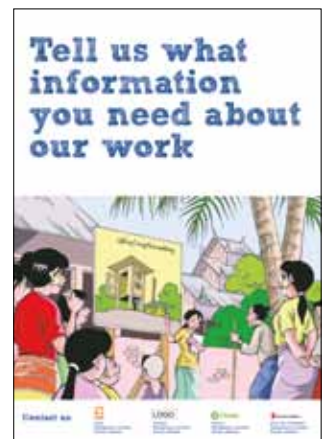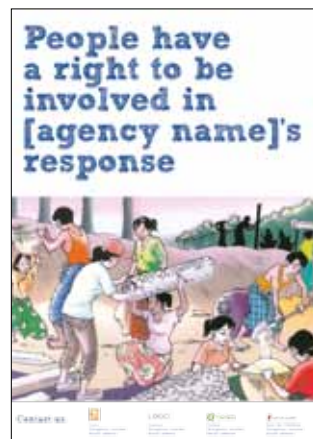
2. Feedback

Minimum Standard

Programmes and projects must have feedback mechanisms that have been discussed and agreed with people affected by the project or programme; and are capable of dealing with positive and negative feedback in addition to complaints.

Why?

Oxfam is a learning organisation, and we want to learn from our beneficiary communities. Beneficiary feedback is essential to inform us how well our projects are running, and how appropriate they are. Feedback can also pick up more serious issues such as fraud or misconduct.

Feedback should be used to make project decisions and adjust plans as necessary –
if we don't know anything is wrong then we can't put it right. We should always let communities know what actions have been taken as a result of their feedback.

If no action was taken – for example if something is outside our control, or not appropriate for the project – we need to let them know that too. Feedback can also alert us to more serious issues, such as fraud, misconduct or sexual exploitation.

It can be hard to ask for feedback, in case it is negative. Don't worry – we are all in the same position, and the purpose of feedback is to help us learn and improve the programme, not to criticise. In any case, feedback can often be positive – which can be encouraging for staff!

GUIDELINES

Here are the steps you need to go through when setting up a feedback and complaints mechanism. Oxfam defines feedback as issues raised that can be resolved in a day or two at project level, and complaints to be more serious issues (usually misconduct such as fraud or sexual exploitation) that need to be taken up at a senior management level. The same mechanism can pick up both.

1. Secure organisational commitment to seek and act on feedback and complaints.
If you do not get management commitment, you will not be able to follow up on the feedback and complaints you receive. Not doing so will let the community down, and probably affect your relationship with them, and the running of the project.

2. Consult with the community to decide the most appropriate method to channel feedback and complaints.
Many programmes use more than one mechanism, to ensure that different groups in the community are being reached. Don't be afraid to try different approaches – not all of them will be successful, and that's OK.

3. Design a process for handling feedback and complaints and identify who will carry out the role
If you are implementing through partners, you will need to decide how they will be involved. Will they set up their own mechanism? Will you set one up together? If it is an Oxfam mechanism, how will you process feedback about the partner?

4. Set up the infrastructure for handling feedback and complaints in the community and train staff.
There are many different types of mechanisms that programmes have used. These include telephone hotlines, community meetings, appointing community focal points,

providing help desks at distributions, having an office 'open door' day – and many more!

5. Raise awareness in the community about how they can feed back and complain, and what about.

6. Receive and record feedback and complaints in a logbook or complaints database.

7. Acknowledge the feedback/complaint either verbally or in writing.

8. Resolve: either informally, using programme knowledge and common sense, or formally, by investigation.
Serious complaints (for example those involving issues such as fraud or sexual exploitation) will need to be dealt with by senior management, following the appropriate Oxfam policy.

9. Respond to the person who complained.
With serious complaints, confidentiality may mean that you are not able to share certain information with the complainant. In this case, you will need to explain this and let them know that their complaint was followed up without providing any confidential details.

10. Record the response in your complaints database and share what you learnt.
It is important to analyse and share trends so we can learn as an organisation.

Adapted from 'Save the Children's video 'Setting up a Complaints and Response Mechanism'. Please use in conjunction with OGB Public Complaints Policy and Guidelines for Implementing Oxfam Public Complaints Policy in the International Division.

Community feeds back on Oxfam's accountability, Somotillo, Nicaragua

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

A feedback and complaints mechanism was implemented in Oxfam's Drought Response Programme in Ethiopia. The team first needed to decide how to solicit feedback from the community. They decided that 'high-tech' mechanisms, such as a phone hotline, were not appropriate in this context, and instead instigated specific community discussion meetings. These took place bi-weekly, and were an opportunity for the community to discuss any issues that they had regarding the project. The community meetings were facilitated by field staff working on that particular project. The community were oriented on the process, including both the rights of the community and the parameters of what Oxfam could respond to.

The discussions were minuted and recorded on a simple Word template, then shared with the relevant project staff. Complaints and feedback that required follow up was logged on an Excel database by the MEAL (Monitoring Evaluating Accountability and Learning) Officer. If the feedback or complaint could be resolved at project level, action was taken by the relevant Technical Team Leader. It was mandatory for them to inform senior management of complaints they received and redressed. Serious complaints were referred to the Programme Manager for resolution.

Finally, the complaint was closed and beneficiaries informed as to the action taken. This was done by the MEAL Officer or project staff as appropriate. Analysis of the complaints and feedback received was undertaken on a bi-weekly basis and used in a progress report.

Most feedback so far has been on day-to-day issues. Common feedback included queries on the registration process, and comments on the quality of services provided. Issues have been addressed together with partners such as the Woreda (District) Administration where appropriate. On the whole, the system has been a success, with changes made to project implementation following feedback. However the team recognise there are some limitations - the open discussion forum means that sensitive issues might not be raised, which could be why serious complaints are not emerging.

The discussion groups might not also include more marginalised members of the community – for example those who work in the home might have difficulty attending, and the elderly or disabled might be physically unable to. However this will be addressed by exploring other, parallel methods to seek feedback and complaints from different groups.

Community giving feedback to MEAL Officer at Shinile, Ethiopia. Photo: Hassan Mahmoud

3. Participation

Minimum Standard

Programmes and projects must have mechanisms that ensure partners and communities are involved in decision-making about (a) what the project will achieve and (b) how this is to be done.

Why?

Oxfam's remit is to work *with others* to overcome poverty and suffering. People have a right to participate in their own development[4], and Oxfam should model this approach. As Oxfam we should try to reinforce people's dignity by involving them in decisions and activities that affect their lines. Given an enabling environment, resources and information to make informed choices, together we can make projects more equitable and effective. We should create opportunities for people to participate at every stage of the project cycle, should they want to.

4. United Nations Declaration of the Right to Development 41/128

GUIDELINES

There are many opportunities to involve people and communities in the project management cycle, from design to evaluation. Are you working with partners? In many programmes, it is our partners who have the most opportunity to involve people. You could look at the project management cycle together and identify points at which the community can be involved. Here are some ideas:

• Invite representatives of local people to participate in project design

• Enable the village committee to take part in project budgeting

• Check the project design with different groups of people from the community

• Invite local community, village committee, and local authorities to take part in developing criteria for selection of those to participate in or benefit from the project

• Announce the criteria and display them in a public place

• Invite the local community and village committee to participate in selecting beneficiaries

• Invite the village committee to take part in monitoring results.

Firstly, practical steps need to be taken to make sure men, women and vulnerable/marginalised people can attend meetings and get involved in project related activities and committees, for example:

• Think about the time of the meeting, and how this fits with men and women's work and domestic responsibilities. Talk to men and women to find a time which is most suitable for them, e.g. avoiding mealtimes.

• Many women have child care responsibilities. Think about providing a crèche or making other childcare arrangements.

• Think about men and women's mobility and security, and the accessibility of the venue. Consider providing transport and/or covering transport costs.

• Choose a venue that women will be comfortable with: somewhere they would normally congregate, or where women and men are used to coming together, not a venue that is traditionally male-dominated.

• Make sure women know about the meeting and are specifically invited to attend by an appropriate person, e.g. a village elder.

• Bear in mind any cultural considerations, such as restrictions on women and men mixing, and think about how to alleviate these, e.g. through seating arrangements. If men and women really can't sit in the same room, hold separate meetings and ensure that women's views are clearly communicated.

• Consider whether the focus of the meeting is likely to influence who attends. For example, men may be more likely to attend meetings about construction and less likely to attend those about health issues, if they consider this to be women's responsibility.

However, participation is about more than being present. You must also take steps to ensure that both men, women and vulnerable/ marginalised people's involvement is meaningful, that their voices are heard and their viewpoints taken into consideration:

• Meet with men and women to explain that their participation is important, and that their views do matter; build their confidence so they feel that they have the right to get involved in matters that affect their lives.

• Make efforts to ensure that partners understand and fully agree with OGB's gendered approach – they will be the prime facilitators and ensurers of this at a community level.

• Meet with men to break down their resistance to women's participation and gain their support. Understand that they may feel threatened, and explain how women's involvement can be beneficial to the whole community.

• Ensure that you have a full understanding of the dynamics, e.g. the presence of female staff may make it easier to involve women.

• Make sure that the meeting is conducted in a language everybody will understand.

• Find ways to give women and men the confidence to voice their opinions; for example, invite women to sit together for mutual support; actively invite people to speak, or work in small groups, which may be less threatening.

• Encourage full debate of different viewpoints before decisions are taken, reinforce that there is not 'right' option.

Adapted from Oxfam GB's Rough Guide to Promoting Women's Participation

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

In the Zimbabwe country programme, communities are included in all stages of the programme cycle. As part of their accountability strategy, the team ensures that there is community participation and representation in decision-making bodies. In the humanitarian programme there are distribution committees that manage the food and non-food distributions. Their duties include mobilisation of communities, receiving and safekeeping of food and non-food items and assisting in the actual food distribution process. Communities are also involved in the public health programme as health and hygiene volunteers.

In the protracted relief programme (long term assistance to vulnerable communities), different project activities are managed by community members. In the garden assistance activities, garden committees comprised of community members oversee the running of project activities. There are also village relief and rehabilitation committees. They are involved in community mobilisation, information dissemination and assist in the management of programmes. All these committees receive training from Oxfam. Other committees and groups that are involved in programme implementation in the protracted relief programme are water user point committees, community health clubs and drama groups.

Project monitoring and evaluation activities for the Oxfam programme in Zimbabwe rely heavily on feedback from beneficiaries and the community as a basis for measuring project performance and impact. Beneficiary communities also participate through participatory targeting and selection of beneficiary households. The food and non-food aid programme in Shurugwi, Kwekwe and Chirumanzu carried out a targeting process where the community was responsible for selecting who would benefit from aid using local indicators with the facilitation of Oxfam staff.

Facilitating a community discussion in Chirumanzu district of Zimbabwe: Photo: Blessing Mutsaka

4. Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning

Minimum Standard

Programme and project design and implementation must ensure that processes are in place which actively involve stakeholders in measuring, learning from and sharing the extent to which we have met partner and community expectations

Why?

People affected by a project should be given the opportunity to judge whether or not that project is improving their lives. Together with Oxfam's own findings, this can determine whether a project is having impact. Community members affected by projects implemented by Oxfam or our partners can participate in monitoring and evaluation throughout the project cycle. For example, they can help design indicators, gather data and discuss findings. With appropriate support, they can also participate in reviews and evaluations.

Accountable monitoring and evaluating means working together with communities to decide what success looks like in the context of any project and how we would measure it. People know best what happened in their communities in the project and why, and by participating can increase a sense of ownership of the project. Remember however that communities can only evaluate their own realities, and other monitoring and evaluation tools should also be used at different levels to triangulate results and to look at wider issues.

GUIDELINES

As a general rule all stages of the monitoring and evaluation cycle should have opportunities for community participation. The amount of engagement will depend on the context and the type of programme.

1. Developing Indicators

Community indictors can be incorporated into planning if it is felt that communities have a different way of measuring outputs and outcomes. These indicators are complimentary to programme indicators but would not necessarily replace them. They are very contact specific, are not generally transferable and are quite resource intense to develop. They often work best in longer term programmes in rural areas.

For more information, see 'Community Indicators', Obia Nixon & Vivien Margaret Walden.

2. Monitoring and data collection

Some points to consider:

• Literacy rates may be low and there may be a need maybe for more pictorial tools

• Surveys do not lend themselves to participation and training community enumerators needs time and effort

• Consider cultural norms when choosing people for data collection – age and sex often determine who can talk to whom, especially around sensitive issues

• There may be hidden agendas that prevent the collection of true data and results can be skewed - triangulate as much as possible

• Results should be fed back to the community in an appropriate form that can be understood by the different groups

3. Including Communities in Monitoring Reviews and other learning events

This will depend very much as what level the reviews are held as it may not always be feasible to transport people to the event. However, it is possible for projects to carry out focus group discussions with communities and feed the information into the main meeting. Making sure that the people attending are true representatives of the community is important as again, this might skew the data presented.

For more information, see 'Increasing our accountability to communities through programme monitoring: A guide for HECA Programme Managers'

4. Evaluation

All evaluations should include some form of community involvement even if it is only getting the views of the population though either quantitative or qualitative data. Participatory evaluation where people evaluate their own programme needs an experienced facilitator and is very time consuming. Used appropriately though, it can be a very powerful experience although the results should always be triangulated to check consistency and avoid bias.

Adapted from 'Increasing our accountability to communities through programme monitoring: A guide for HECA Programme Managers' One World Trust and 'Community Indicators', Obia Nixon & Vivien Margaret Walden.

Community assessing Oxfam's accountability to them, Matara, Sri Lanka

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Oxfam's Upper Nile programme in South Sudan is a public health programme working on provision of clean drinking water, provision of sanitation, and hygiene promotion through community promoters . The area is remote and everything has to be flown in. Many of the villages are even more isolated - during the rainy season they can be cut off for three to eight months.

In the programme, monitoring information about facility usage and hygiene behaviour was collected by community volunteers and then fed up through hygiene promoters to the programme manager. The system was labour intensive and meant that often information was not useful or was never analysed, and more importantly, the community themselves aware not fully engaged and were not fully participating in the system. This triggered discussion to find a more participatory method that would serve all purposes.

The team decided to pilot a new approach in their model household system. This is a system to improve household hygiene, where a household that meets the model household criteria gets awarded a flag that can be displayed in the compound. Households are continually monitored and if at any time the household isn't meeting the criteria then the flag is removed, or the colour of flag is changed until that household demonstrates it meets the criteria. The flags have become prestigious in the community, with households keen to earn one.

Previously, the team had looked for certain criteria - Do they have a latrine? Are the children clean? Do they have a refuse pit? Is the compound swept clean? They also looked at the diarrhoea rate - has it gone up, or has it gone down? They also looked for open defecation. If the household didn't meet all these then the household doesn't qualify for model household status.

However, from now on community members will decide how they will define a "model household" - that may or may not be the same as the Oxfam definition. This way they can monitor these households and use the information to improve those households that do not rate a green flag. The team also want to try mapping the community so that the volunteers can plot in or "flag up" the model households on the map. This map could be a good community discussion focus and pictorial monitoring tool.

The community are electing volunteers from amongst themselves to monitor, who will move around and check which households qualify for ideal household status. They will do this on a monthly basis, and every month they come up with a list of new households. It will be very interesting to see if the community indicators and monitoring data will be different from Oxfam's.

Top: Participants in community Monitoring Review day with Vivien Walden, OGB Global Humanitarian MEL Adviser, Southern Sudan. Photo: Jane Beesley
Above: Deputy Country Representative and other staff at a Question and Answer session, Dorowa village, South Sudan

5. Annexe

Sharing financial information

Sharing some degree of financial information with communities affected by our projects is part of Oxfam GB's minimum standard on transparency. The degree of information that you share has to be appropriate, and this has to be a judgement made by you, the project or PIP manager, partners and representative community members as appropriate. Whilst often challenging to start off with there are many advantages to sharing financial information:

- it models good practice – in many programmes, Oxfam are calling on governments and other duty bearers to be more transparent – so we should make sure we are being transparent too;

- people have a right to know about what resources are being used on their behalf - by us and others;

- it helps develop a relationship of trust and openness with the community;

- if the community can see what we are planning to spend on their project, they can identify any fraud or corruption that arises.

We know that it can be difficult to share financial information. There are potential risks around security, and bribery or corruption. However projects that have shared appropriate financial information have found these issues much less difficult than they had imagined and that the benefits far outweigh the risks.

The fact that sharing financial information appears in Oxfam GB's minimum standards for accountability indicates the importance the senior programme staff put on our ability to do this and do it well. We urge you to try to make sharing this information an reality in your programmes and we are ready and able to help whenever you wish.

GUIDELINES

1. How can Oxfam GB and partners provide financial reports to communities?

Financial reports must provide information (a) that is useful for users, and (b) in a style that is easy for users to understand. The following guidelines set out some principles which can help achieve this when preparing financial reports for communities. We hope that this will help Oxfam GB staff start to think about the practicalities of financial reporting to communities.

However, this information sheet only sets out general guidelines. Oxfam GB staff will need to consider how to apply the principles mentioned below in each different set of circumstances they face.

a) Language

Reports should be provided in a language that as many beneficiaries speak as possible, and ideally in their mother tongue. Short reports are normally easy to translate. The goal may be to help the whole community understand the general financial position, not just a handful of representatives understand all the details.

b) Content

The aim of reporting to communities is to help people understand what is being spent on their behalf. So content should be relevant to local people, about the specific activities that Oxfam GB and partners (and often community members) will carry out. Simple reports that show expenditure compared to the budget often work well.

Expenditure can be summarised by activity, or by geographical area, or by budget line – or by some combination of these. The total budget for each activity, area or budget line should also be presented alongside expenditure. Good practice suggests that full project costs should be made available. However, it may not be practical to publish sensitive salary information. A report setting out direct project costs is likely to be much better than nothing.

As a rule of thumb, each financial report should have no more than 15 lines of information: more lines make reports confusing.

Reports should be updated at least every month. They should be presented in local currency.

c) Presentation

Normally, Oxfam GB or partners should aim to make financial reports publicly available at the community level. Reports can be written up on white-boards or flip-charts which are publicly displayed at NGOs' offices, health centres or distribution points. Paper copies of reports can be made freely available at the same places. Some NGOs have published summary reports in newspapers and other local media.

Financial information can also be presented visually, using simple graphs or charts which people may find easier to understand than numbers.

Financial reports can be regularly presented to communities at community meetings, or to community leaders at project management meetings.

In general, the more open Oxfam GB can be with its financial information, the better. After all, this is money that Oxfam GB has collected on behalf of local communities and which it aims to spend on communities' behalf. Secrecy often gives rise to suspicion and can create fertile ground for inefficiency or even fraud.

d) Who provides reports?

Financial reports can be provided either by Oxfam GB's finance staff or by its programme/project staff. Ideally finance and programme staff might collaborate together. For example, finance staff might be able to explain finance reports at community meetings. (This also has the advantage of encouraging finance staff to be more directly involved in field work.)

Would it be feasible to consider making finance staff responsible for providing financial reports to local communities. This might provide a useful segregation of duties between programme staff and finance staff.

Adapted from Mango www.whocounts.com

Information board at Manmota, Indonesia

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM TEAR FUND

Spin Boldak is a small town on the southern border of Afghanistan with Pakistan. Tearfund's Disaster Management Team (DMT) had been working there for the previous two years, with IDPs displaced from within Afghanistan and with refugees on the Pakistan side of the border. As the Afghan government was closing down the IDP camps in Spin Boldak, the project was supporting the integration of IDPs into the host community in Spin Boldak as an alternative to the IDPs moving back towards Kandahar to live, if remaining in Spin Boldak was their preference.

As part of this support the local school was to be extended and renovated, which would provide benefit for both the host community and the IDPs. When it came to project implementation the building and renovation work being carried out was above the specifications planned for and budgeted in the project proposal. This was partly due to raised expectations of the school authorities, who influenced what work was carried out, even if it varied from the original plans. Six classrooms were completed to a standard much higher than Tearfund had funding for.

When it became clear that the project was overspending the project manager halted the project in order that a review be carried out, but this decision was made without reference to the school authorities. The school then became unsure as to what was happening and became suspicious of Tearfund, as other agencies had in the past not fulfilled their commitments for planned work. They feared that funds for the school were going to be used elsewhere.

The school authorities would only allow work to restart if Tearfund agreed to complete the other classrooms to the same higher standard. As part of the discussions the budget for direct project costs was provided to the school authorities, something that had not been done previously. Negotiations with the Ministry of Education concluded with work restarting with a compromise position of remaining classrooms being built to a specification higher than originally planned but lower than the first six classrooms.

As a result of the sharing of budget information, the community who had a distrust of NGOs from negative past experiences, was able to see that Tearfund was being transparent and saw for the first time that only finite sums of money had been given for this project. They more clearly understood that if the specifications for the classrooms increased then there would have to be savings made in other areas.

As well as improving security and acceptance for the project staff working on the ground in what is an insecure environment, Tearfund also discovered that one of its own staff had been involved in fraud through the procurement process. The amounts were small but were probably known by suppliers in the town. Disclosure of budget information meant that the school authorities were able to see costings and to challenge these when they looked inappropriate compared to actual local costs of materials.

FURTHER RESOURCES ON ACCOUNTABILITY

If you can access it, our intranet site is here
http://intranet.oxfam.org.uk/programme/pm/accountability

HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Project) have the HAP Standards for Accountability to measure ourselves against, plus many tools and resources from a wide range of NGOs: www.hapinternational.org

ECB (Emergency Capacity Building Project) produce the Good Enough Guide to Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies, and have other useful tools: www.ecbproject.org/accountability

BOND and ALNAP also have some resources:
www.bond.org.uk
http://www.alnap.org/

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