



## From words to action: Community engagement and accountability in practice

(Workshop 4)  
Outline

### Key highlights

Community engagement and accountability (CEA) is increasingly recognized in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) as an essential priority, pivotal to operational excellence, building acceptance and trust and contributing to long-term community resilience.<sup>1</sup> It has been repeatedly demonstrated that humanitarian responses are more effective and relevant when affected communities participate in programme design and implementation, communicating local insights and feedback to implementing actors and holding them accountable for consequent programmatic changes.

Although the Movement has already committed to a people-centred approach in the Principles and Rules for Humanitarian Assistance and the more recent Grand Bargain<sup>2</sup> 'Participation Revolution' work stream, our ability to systematically translate this commitment into practice remains a challenge. CEA approaches continue to be limited and fragmented in their implementation. This workshop will discuss a roadmap to more effective and systematic CEA solutions, moving towards a common Movement approach to CEA that delegations and National Societies can tailor to their operating environments.

### Background information on the topic

The process of engaging local communities as equal partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian responses and development programmes is commonly referred to as community engagement and accountability (CEA). Indeed, local people and communities hold valuable insights about knowledge, practices and power dynamics that must be taken into account when shaping humanitarian needs and responses. CEA ensures that the affected community receives potentially lifesaving information in a timely manner, has its concerns heard by relevant stakeholders through concerted, evidence-based advocacy and participates in addressing the negative behaviours and practices identified.

There is an operational imperative and an ethical responsibility for humanitarian actors to engage in CEA. The participation of the people affected and the accountability of organizations involved in humanitarian work to them are ethical standards enshrined in the [Code of Conduct](#) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations in Disaster Relief.<sup>3</sup> These standards have progressively achieved greater recognition as timely, actionable and trusted information, and feedback mechanisms as well as the ability to communicate about healthy and safe behaviours have become forms of aid in their own right.

<sup>1</sup> The IFRC's commitment to a people-led approach is highlighted in the most recent Decision on Beneficiary Communication: Promoting active engagement and wider participation of the communities in our operations and programmes (GA/13/40), adopted by the General Assembly in 2013.

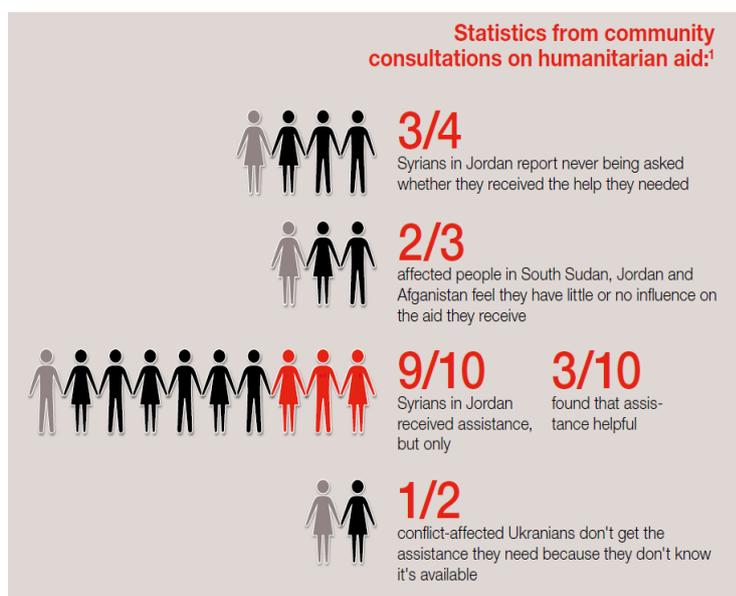
<sup>2</sup> The 'Grand Bargain' is an agreement between more than 30 of the biggest donors and aid providers that aims to get more means into the hands of people in need.

<sup>3</sup> Principle 7. Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid. Principle 9. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.

Therefore, over the past 15 years the humanitarian sector has invested in a range of quality and accountability initiatives focused on establishing common standards of conduct towards the people we serve.<sup>4</sup> These initiatives emphasize the importance of communicating with and listening to crisis-affected populations, not just as a human right and a moral duty, but also as a means of improving the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance for affected populations.<sup>5</sup>

With National Societies at the frontline of our work, CEA has already been partly integrated into Movement responses to the Haiti and Nepal earthquakes, typhoons in the Philippines, crises in South Sudan, Yemen and Syria, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the migration crisis in Europe. The Movement engaged millions of people in programmatic design and implementation, using a range of engagement channels, such as hotlines, automated phone systems, traditional social mobilization approaches, interactive radio programmes, SMS messaging, feedback boxes and surveys. Communities were provided with information that helped them stay safe and healthy. Two-way communication channels were used to gather structured feedback from affected populations, helping to guide decision making in programmes and operations, while fostering a trusting relationship between the Movement and those it seeks to serve. These experiences highlighted the benefits of integrating CEA into programme design as early as possible and not as an afterthought.

At the macro level, the Movement is co-championing the Grand Bargain localization work stream, which entails working together to scale up investment in National Societies' capacity building, leadership and promote a 'paradigm shift' that will bring about a 'Participation Revolution'. On their end, donors committed to more reliable funding with fewer restrictions, allowing local actors' financing to be flexible enough to respond to feedback and the needs of communities. This will also ensure that participation and power balance issues are taken into account when considering funding.



1. Community consultations on humanitarian aid. Overall findings – World Humanitarian Summit, 2016 Ipsos Public Affairs.

Yet, as highlighted in recent evaluations carried out by the Red Cross and Red Crescent<sup>6</sup> and partners, more must be done to engage with communities in a meaningful way. A 2016 survey, conducted in preparation for the World Humanitarian Forum, found that people still did not feel informed or listened to. In 2017, new surveys<sup>7</sup> from [Haiti](#), [Afghanistan](#) and [Lebanon](#) showed that, in general, recipients of international aid feel that they have little say in the assistance that reaches them and that it is not enough. [Haiti's](#) results were the most negative. This means that, today, we might still be delivering aid that is considered useless to the people that need it most.

<sup>4</sup> British Red Cross, 2007; [Myanmar Red Cross Society CEA Minimum Standards, 2016](#); Knox-Clarke and Mitchell, 2011; [Core Humanitarian Standard \(CHS\) framework](#) and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP); Sphere Handbook, Humanitarian Charter, number 12.

<sup>5</sup> This approach aligns with and supports the aim of the Transformative Agenda to strengthen accountability to affected populations. It is also aligned with three of the Core Humanitarian Standards (commitments 3, 4 and 5).

<sup>6</sup> See the IFRC roadmap to strengthening community engagement and accountability.

<sup>7</sup> [A field perspective on the Grand Bargain](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Ground Truth Solutions

Better delivery on our CEA commitments will entail agreeing on a common approach and a set of minimum standards and actions across the Movement and ensuring consistent investment in this area. The need for a common approach to CEA is also being flagged by operational evaluations, donors and National Societies themselves. The Movement already has clearly defined CEA operational guidance, the [CEA Guide and toolkit](#). The ICRC has also recently drafted its Accountability to Affected Populations Framework.

### **Objectives of the workshop**

This workshop will discuss the main needs existing at the policy and operational level to adopt a more systematic approach to CEA. This will enable the Movement to better include people receiving aid in the decisions impacting them and implement a smarter and more localized 'community impact first' approach to humanitarian response and long-term programming.

In particular, the workshop will discuss ways in which the Movement can:

- ensure that the meaningful participation of affected people becomes a standard way of working across the Movement;
- define our policy and minimum standard commitments towards institutionalizing CEA within the Movement;
- ensure that successful CEA experiences are well documented and lessons learned are shared in order to inform innovative CEA approaches and move towards more effective resilience programming;
- ensure a Movement commitment to invest in CEA's institutionalization over the next two years.

### **Guiding questions *(optional)***

- Acknowledging the valuable work already being carried out by Movement partners, how can CEA be mainstreamed and sustained as a central component in Red Cross and Red Crescent programming?
- How do we establish systems to ensure that CEA is at the core of National Societies' operations and a tool for management decisions?
- What resources and organizational commitment(s) do we need for the Red Cross and Red Crescent to remain innovative in the area of CEA?
- What systems should we prioritize to engage more effectively with the people we serve?

### **Reference to official working documents and previous CoD and IC resolutions, etc.**

- IFRC General Assembly Beneficiary Communication Decision (GA/13/40);
- The resolution builds on the Movement's long-established commitment to accountability, including the:
  - Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (1995);
  - The Code for Good Partnership of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2009);
  - The Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance (2013);
- Movement [CEA Guide and toolkit](#);
- Movement [pledges](#) made on the occasion of the World Humanitarian Summit;

- The [Grand Bargain](#) commitments contained in the ten work streams (in particular the 'Participation Revolution' work stream 6 and 'Localization of Aid' work stream 2 commitments);
- IFRC Roadmap and Framework to strengthen community engagement and accountability in IFRC-supported programmes (to be published soon).