

**Power of humanity**

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**COUNCIL OF DELEGATES  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS  
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

Geneva, Switzerland  
8 December 2019

**Movement-Wide Commitments for Community Engagement and  
Accountability**

**Background document**

**Document prepared by  
The International Committee of the Red Cross and  
the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
in consultation with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

Geneva, July 2019

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This background document provides the background and rationale for a resolution proposed jointly by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to adopt a **Movement-wide approach and minimum commitments to community engagement and accountability**. The resolution aims to consolidate and scale up implementation of existing commitments and good practices related to community engagement and accountability. It reflects a growing awareness and commitment to **put people at the centre** of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's policies, programmes and operations by more systematically applying community engagement, participation and accountability measures in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of the Movement's efforts and deliver greater accountability to people vulnerable to and affected by crisis.<sup>1</sup>

### 1) INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement oblige the components of the Movement to work to prevent and alleviate human suffering in situations of crisis, and to provide assistance without discrimination, based solely on and in proportion to need. The [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGOs\) in Disaster Relief](#) also highlights individual and collective accountability to the people whom the Movement seeks to assist. It sets out the intention to involve them and support their participation in the design, management and implementation of aid programmes, to respect local culture and customs, and to recognize and strengthen local capacities and resilience.

The Movement-wide approach to **community engagement and accountability** consolidates these commitments and sets out a framework and practical actions for ensuring that **people vulnerable to and affected by crisis are at the centre** of programming and operational decision-making. It builds on previous discussions at the Council of Delegates, as well as programme evaluations, lessons learned and good practices that are intended to bring about more effective and accountable humanitarian action. Across the Movement, many National Societies now have policies and procedures to integrate community engagement and accountability into their emergency operations and programmes. The IFRC and ICRC have developed [A Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability \(CEA\)](#) and [other tools](#) building on existing National Society best practice. The ICRC has also adopted an [Accountability to Affected People Institutional Framework](#) that guides and orients its operations, and the IFRC continues to integrate community engagement and accountability into its programmes and promote and support National Society capacity in this area.

Externally, recent developments such as the [World Humanitarian Summit](#) outcomes, the [Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability](#) and the [Grand Bargain](#) all highlight the increased interest in and commitment to community engagement and accountability to affected people and communities. Nevertheless, measures to support community engagement and accountability are still not systematically applied across the humanitarian sector.

However, as noted in the conclusions of the 2017 Council of Delegates [workshop on community engagement and accountability](#), while the Movement has made good progress in

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<sup>1</sup> This background document reflects many of the initial contributions and recommendations from the ongoing consultation process on this resolution with National Societies, the ICRC and the IFRC. For more information on the process, including how to get involved and provide input, please contact Philip Tamminga: [philip.tamminga@gmail.com](mailto:philip.tamminga@gmail.com)

adopting community-engagement and accountability approaches, these are not applied consistently across programmes and operations. This is especially important in situations where several Movement components are working together in the same context. Uncoordinated approaches to community engagement and accountability can undermine the trust and confidence of affected people and communities in the Movement, and can contribute to misunderstandings, tensions and poorer outcomes for them – contrary to the Fundamental Principles and the “do no harm” principle.

Accordingly, the resolution submitted to the Council of Delegates will commit the components of the Movement to harmonizing, aligning and consolidating existing efforts to engage with and be accountable to vulnerable and crisis-affected people, thereby ensuring that efforts are more consistent and effective and people’s needs and priorities are better addressed and their rights and dignity better protected.

## 2) RATIONALE

The proposed resolution aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of Red Cross and Red Crescent action and to reaffirm and strengthen individual and collective accountability to people vulnerable to and affected by crisis by adopting and more consistently implementing common approaches to community engagement and accountability, while recognizing the different roles, responsibilities and mandates of each component of the Movement.

Consistently engaging with vulnerable and affected people and incorporating their perspectives, participation and input into the assessment, design, implementation and monitoring phases of programmes and operations are key to ensuring that Red Cross and Red Crescent action is effective and accountable. This will allow the Movement to:

- understand and address the specific needs and concerns of different vulnerable and marginalized groups in the community, with a focus on gender, age, diversity and protection issues
- monitor and assess whether project designs actually meet the affected people’s needs and priorities and are delivered in a way that is timely, relevant and appropriate to the context
- identify, mitigate and manage risks and take timely corrective action to address changes in the circumstances, needs or priorities of affected people as required
- empower affected people to be more actively involved in decision-making and strengthen their capacity and resilience to cope with future crises
- reinforce trust, transparency and respect in the Movement’s relationship with affected people.

Adopting, implementing and monitoring progress on implementing the resolution will help consolidate and expand existing Movement commitments, experience and best practices in integrating community engagement and accountability in programming and operations. This will help ensure the Movement is better able to provide **high-quality assistance** and deliver **more consistent, effective results** for vulnerable and affected people, while **protecting their rights and dignity** in an increasingly complex and challenging environment for principled and accountable humanitarian action.

At the same time, formally setting out its commitments to community engagement and accountability in a resolution will allow the Movement to take a **leadership role in the humanitarian sector** by demonstrating that its coordinated and coherent approach helps it meet its international commitments to deliver more accountable and effective humanitarian action.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These include the commitments made by the IFRC and ICRC as part of the Grand Bargain, particularly around the participation revolution and localization agendas, as well as the World Humanitarian Summit outcomes and the commitments made by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

### 3) KEY ELEMENTS TO A MOVEMENT-WIDE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The resolution looks to achieve consensus in the Movement on improving community engagement and accountability in **seven key areas**, as highlighted below.

#### 1. Strengthening a Movement-wide, harmonized approach

The resolution will propose clearer definitions of community engagement and accountability to affected people and how they relate to the distinct but complementary mandates, roles and responsibilities of National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC. It will also call on all the components of the Movement to adopt policies and take measures to apply the commitments consistently in programmes and operations.

*Why is this important?*

The primary focus of community engagement and accountability is to ensure the **lived experiences, knowledge, perspectives and opinions of vulnerable and affected people** are systematically used to support evidence-based decision-making and improve the quality and effectiveness of Red Cross and Red Crescent actions. Community engagement and accountability help gauge whether programmes and operations are addressing affected people's priorities, needs and preferences, and whether they feel empowered and have influence over decisions that affect them.

While there have been good efforts to promote community engagement and accountability within the Movement, recent consultations around the draft Council of Delegates resolution show that there is still a need to establish a clearer shared definition of the key concepts and how they can be integrated into Red Cross and Red Crescent policies, programmes and operational practices. Without a common definition and understanding, **there is a risk that individual components of the Movement will adopt different and contradictory approaches**, which could undermine the quality and effectiveness of programmes, contribute to tensions and inequitable and unsustainable relations with communities, and undermine unity within the Movement.

The resolution will attempt to clarify what are community engagement and accountability and provide a set of **recommended minimum actions** for reflecting and applying them in policies, programmes and operations based on the following definitions:

#### ***Proposed definitions:***

**Accountability to affected people** is the mutual responsibility of all Movement components to use their power and resources ethically and responsibly to **put the interests of vulnerable and affected people at the centre of decision-making** and ensure that humanitarian action leads to the best possible **outcomes** for them while protecting and preserving their **rights and dignity** and increasing their **resilience** for future crises.

**Community engagement** refers to the processes used by Movement components to **engage and communicate** with vulnerable and affected people in order to better understand their diverse capacities and vulnerabilities, gather their perspectives on their needs, priorities and preferences around how assistance is designed and delivered, and ensure they have safe and equitable access and opportunities to provide input and feedback on the quality and effectiveness of assistance and to participate actively in decisions that affect them.

## **2. Improving contextual analysis and understanding of the diversity of communities**

The resolution will highlight the need to better understand the diversity of experiences, risks and vulnerabilities faced by communities and to ensure that protection, gender, age, diversity and inclusion are reflected in how assistance is designed and delivered.

*Why is this important?*

Carrying out effective and accountable programmes and operations depends on assessing, analysing and understanding the social, economic, cultural and political context and how it shapes and influences different people's and communities' capacities and vulnerabilities as well as the risks they face. This includes understanding communities' formal and informal power structures and relationships and recognizing how they are affected by factors such as gender, age, diversity and inclusion.

A good contextual analysis provides the components of the Movement with a stronger evidence base to support a more integrated, multidisciplinary approach to addressing the needs and priorities of vulnerable people. It also helps to identify any specific actions needed to address gender, age, protection, diversity and inclusion issues that make them more vulnerable. Compiling this information as part of preparedness and contingency planning can save time in the event of a crisis, and regularly updating and revising the contextual analysis throughout the course of a programme or operation can help ensure that activities are adapted to any changes in a timely and efficient manner.

Understanding existing structures, processes and trusted and preferred channels for communicating and sharing information within a community is also important. It enables programmes and operations to use culturally relevant and appropriate mechanisms to consult with different vulnerable groups and communities about their priorities and preferences and to use that information to design the most effective measures for meeting their needs and expectations. This also helps to ensure that protection concerns, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse and/or other risks are identified and mitigated when designing interventions and that information is shared in appropriate, accessible and inclusive ways.

## **3. Promoting greater participation and use of local capacity**

The resolution will call on the components of the Movement to find meaningful ways for vulnerable and affected people to engage with and participate in decisions that affect them. This includes providing opportunities for them to participate in the design, implementation, management and monitoring of assistance activities. It also includes prioritizing the use of local capacity, knowledge and expertise whenever possible to find ways to reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks and increase resilience.

*Why is this important?*

In accordance with the Movement's commitments, vulnerable and affected people have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, including decisions on programme design, implementation and management. However, many programmes and operations are still designed in a top-down manner and fail to take into consideration the knowledge, expertise and capacities of local communities when defining priorities and determining the most appropriate and effective means of addressing needs. Often consultation is limited to getting peoples' input in the needs-assessment phase, with little attention paid to how communities can contribute to implementing and managing activities or take an active role in monitoring the activities' quality and effectiveness.

Providing affected people opportunities to consult with and participate in all phases of

programmes is an important way to ensure that plans and activities are relevant and appropriate to the specific context and address the diverse needs within a community. Listening to affected people, providing equitable, meaningful ways to participate in and influence decision-making, and recognizing and prioritizing the use of local knowledge and capacities are important to verifying that programmes and operations are effectively meeting the needs and expectations of vulnerable and affected people. They can also strengthen affected people's sense of ownership of programmes. This in turn can help reinforce local capacities and resilience and ensure more effective and sustainable outcomes.

Movement components need to systematically incorporate processes for affected people to actively and equitably engage in needs assessments and programme design, implementation, monitoring and management. These mechanisms for engagement must be adapted to the context and consider the preferences of the community. They should provide safe, appropriate and equitable opportunities to help define and prioritize aid activities and determine the most appropriate modes of delivery. Special consideration should be given to promoting gender equality and, in particular, to ensuring that communities are represented inclusively and equitably, involving the participation and engagement of all groups within a population, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.

The Movement also needs to prioritize the use of local knowledge, capacities and resources when reducing risks and preparing for and responding to crises. In particular, all components of the Movement should integrate measures to support and strengthen capacities at the community level, including **local Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers** and community-based organizations. Whenever possible, the Movement should look for ways to channel funding and resources directly towards supporting local actors and, in particular, to prioritize strengthening capacities around community engagement and accountability as the foundation for more effective community-based action aimed at improving preparedness, resilience and humanitarian action.

#### **4. Listening, responding to and acting on feedback**

The commitments will emphasize that all components of the Movement need to collect and analyse feedback and input from vulnerable and affected people regularly and to use them to inform decision-making, take corrective actions and report back to communities on actions and decisions taken because of the feedback.

##### *Why is this important?*

Systematically and proactively collecting feedback from affected people in all phases of a programme or operation is essential to ensuring activities are effective and to avoiding negative effects. Feedback can help identify what is working well, what is not and what needs to change in order to more effectively meet the needs and respect the rights of affected people. Communities may not accept or use poorly designed mechanisms, especially if efforts are not made both to understand affected people's trusted and preferred communication channels and preferences for providing feedback, and to inform them of how to access information and provide feedback or complaints. In all cases, proximity to affected people and direct interaction with them, along with complementary mechanisms, help ensure that programmes and operations have accurate, valid information provided from the perspective of the people affected.

Collecting feedback without following up, or failing to report back to affected people on how their feedback was used, undermines trust and confidence in the Movement and its components. This is why it is equally important to define how feedback will be analysed and used in management and decision-making processes, as well as how affected people will be informed about any decisions and actions taken as a result. Measures to obtain informed

consent, maintain confidentiality around information gathered through feedback mechanisms and protect and safeguard data are particularly important.

## **5. Improving transparency and communication with communities**

The commitments will call on the components of the Movement to take measures to share information with vulnerable and affected people in transparent, accessible and appropriate ways. This includes information about the Movement's principles and values, programmes, available assistance and other relevant matters, with a focus on issues of gender, diversity and inclusion. To this end, advocacy and communication work related to risk reduction, resilience and behaviour change should respect local norms and practices and be based on appropriate engagement with communities.

### *Why is this important?*

In line with The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief, Movement components have a responsibility to share timely, accurate, accessible, transparent and relevant information with vulnerable and affected people about the Fundamental Principles and how the Movement works, as well as specific details of programme and operation objectives, planned activities, selection criteria for providing assistance and how to obtain more information or provide feedback and complaints. This basic information should be provided in appropriate and accessible ways in order to ensure that all vulnerable and affected people, as well as other relevant stakeholders, receive, understand and can act on the information.

The components of the Movement should consult with vulnerable and affected people on their information needs and communication preferences, including trusted information sources and communication channels as well as design mechanisms for two-way communication that enable affected people to exercise their right to information, provide feedback and complaints about the quality and effectiveness of assistance and the relationship with Red Cross or Red Crescent staff and volunteers, and learn how this information will be used for decision-making and reported back to them.

Movement components should also strive to promote equitable, respectful two-way communication channels with affected people, invest the time and resources to listen to and engage in a dialogue with them based on mutual respect, and commit to responding to their concerns and reporting back how those concerns have been considered and addressed in decision-making. This is particularly the case when dealing with negative feedback or situations where assistance is not in line with the priorities, preferences or expectations of vulnerable and affected people, which presents an opportunity to engage in dialogue and often results in finding alternative solutions to problems. In turn, this helps reinforce acceptance of and trust and confidence in the Movement and its components – critically important for safe humanitarian access.

## **6. Strengthening capacity in the Movement**

The components of the Movement will be asked to share knowledge, learning and experiences with a view to strengthening community-engagement capacity at all levels. This includes ensuring community-engagement strategies are an integral part of all programmes and are adapted to the specific operational contexts and mandates of each component of the Movement. It also includes supporting measures to strengthen the skills and capacity of National Society staff and volunteers working with vulnerable communities, such as through training, technical assistance and mobilizing adequate resources to incorporate community engagement and accountability into programmes and operations.

### *Why is this important?*

As noted above, the Movement already possesses significant capacity for, experience in and good practices around integrating community engagement and accountability into programmes and operations. However, this experience has not been sufficiently documented, shared and applied consistently across the Movement. Meeting the Movement's commitments to **put people at the centre** requires scaling up and enhancing existing good practices for community engagement and accountability and supporting continuous learning and improvement across the Movement.

Each component of the Movement will need to work to strengthen and integrate community engagement in programmes and operations. This may require training, support and technical assistance to adapt and apply existing community-engagement and accountability tools – such as the [Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability \(CEA\)](#) and the [Community Engagement and Accountability toolkit](#) – in programmes and operations, including in management and decision-making processes. It may also require building support for community engagement and accountability and fostering understanding of their importance among Movement leadership, management and technical staff. Most importantly, it will require investing in Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers who directly engage with vulnerable and affected people at the community level so that they have the skills, competencies, resources and support needed to meet these commitments effectively.

## **7. Improving coordination in the Movement**

Finally, the commitments will reaffirm the need for coordinated approaches to communicating with, engaging with and promoting the participation of vulnerable and affected people and communities in programmes and responses. This includes cooperation programmes between National Societies and responses to crisis situations where other Movement components are present, recognizing the distinct mandates, roles and operational procedures of each.

### *Why is this important?*

Uncoordinated and contradictory approaches risk undermining the Movement's relationships with vulnerable and affected people and communities and can negatively affect programme quality and effectiveness. By contrast, coordinated, common and coherent approaches enable the Movement to increase efficiency, avoid duplicating efforts and maximize the coverage, quality and effectiveness of community-engagement and accountability strategies, thereby increasing the effectiveness of programmes and operations for vulnerable and affected people.

This may require revising and updating current models of cooperation and strengthening coordination capacity in order to work together in a harmonized, coherent manner when multiple components of the Movement are working with communities in parallel. Important aspects that need to be addressed in programmes and operations, and in organizational development and capacity-building efforts within National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC, include defining how components of the Movement share information, collect, analyse and use feedback, identify trends and issues, and adapt activities in line with the changing contexts and needs and priorities of communities. They also include monitoring and measuring performance from a people-centred perspective.



#### 4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The resource implications of adopting the resolution and implementing community-engagement and accountability commitments **will vary** depending on the existing capacities and resources of National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC, as well as on the nature of Red Cross and Red Crescent programmes and operations and the context in which they take place.

In many cases, developing, integrating and aligning policies and procedures for community engagement and accountability will not require significant resources, as the commitments should be **largely consistent and compatible** with existing programme and operational frameworks.

In the case of **programmes and operations**, the Movement already has access to many tools and resources that can be easily adapted to support existing processes for needs assessments, design and planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In some instances, additional work may be needed to further incorporate community engagement and accountability into new and existing tools, such as for performance measurement and information management.

The resolution and accompanying recommended actions will recommend that **Movement components review the community-engagement and accountability needs of all programmes and operations and determine minimum actions tailored to the context**. This may require prioritizing specific community-engagement and accountability measures in budgets for programmes and operations (see below). However, community engagement and accountability should always be considered an integral part of effective programme-management practices and essential to achieving relevant, appropriate and effective outcomes for vulnerable and affected people.

Based on the consultations held with components of the Movement thus far, it is clear that all components of the Movement will need to invest in strengthening their organizational capacities and competencies in community engagement and accountability. This will likely require **more training and capacity-building** and, in some cases, specialized technical assistance and support for programmes and operations. The resolution will call on the IFRC, ICRC and National Societies to inventory existing tools and resources, identify gaps and develop a common strategy for capacity-building, technical assistance, sharing knowledge and learning.

In the broadest sense, four main levels of resource engagement should be considered:

- 1) **Prioritization:** Given a situation with fixed human and financial resources, the community-engagement and accountability minimum actions should be prioritized when planning activities (monthly, quarterly, yearly or otherwise). This might involve:
  - a. rating and ranking the proposed activities based on community-engagement and accountability criteria
  - b. ensuring that the proposed minimum actions are reflected in the activities' success indicators
  - c. ensuring that the staff working on key activities are trained in/knowledgeable about the proposed minimum commitments and actions
  - d. offering the opportunity for public involvement in the prioritization process (i.e. by communities and affected people).
- 2) **Prioritization and allocation of funds:** Together with the prioritization of community-engagement and accountability minimum actions, budgets should, when possible, be increased for and/or funds reallocated towards activities implementing the proposed minimum standards. This might involve:

- a. including community-engagement and accountability activities in planning
  - b. specifically allocating funds for community-engagement and accountability activities
  - c. including community-engagement and accountability indicators in success criteria for monitoring and budgeting activities.
- 3) **Prioritization and allocation of human resources:** Together with the prioritization of community-engagement and accountability minimum actions, staff should, when possible, be trained in and assigned to implementing the proposed minimum standards. This might involve:
- a. training staff in community-engagement and accountability minimum standards and actions
  - b. assigning staff to community-engagement and accountability activities (50–100%)
  - c. recruiting staff based on technical expertise related to community engagement and accountability.
- 4) **Prioritization and allocation of funds and human resources:** All of the measures above are implemented. This might in addition involve allocating funds for assigning staff to community-engagement and accountability activities.

Whenever possible, the highest level of resource engagement should be selected.

## 5) MONITORING AND MEASURING PROGRESS

The success of this resolution depends on how well each component of the Movement reflects and applies the commitments in its own policies and procedures. The components of the Movement will be requested to monitor progress and report back to the next Council of Delegates. The resolution will include a suggested measurement framework for better monitoring and reporting how well community engagement and accountability are integrated into the Movement on various levels, e.g. by:

- assessing how well a specific community-engagement and accountability policy framework has been integrated into other programming and operational policies and procedures after being adopted
- establishing specific community-engagement and accountability plans as part of programme and operational plans
- determining affected people's level of engagement, participation and influence in all phases of programmes and operations
- determining the degree to which input, feedback and complaints are systematically integrated into programme and operational management and decision-making processes
- determining affected people's level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of programmes and operations as well as with their relationship with the Movement and its components
- integrating specific community-engagement and accountability measures into mechanisms for capacity-building, organizational development, cooperation and coordination.

## 6) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed resolution and commitments to community engagement and accountability will enable the Movement to **consolidate, strengthen and scale up existing commitments and measures** for improving community engagement and accountability in Red Cross and Red Crescent programmes and operations. The resolution will be accompanied by a **road map** to facilitate implementing these commitments, along with the recommended minimum actions

and additional measures to progressively expand community engagement and accountability in policies and practices.

The success of the resolution will require a shared commitment and mutual responsibilities at all levels of the Movement:

- **Governance, leadership and senior management** will need to communicate their commitment to scaling up and integrating community engagement and accountability within their organizations.
- Community engagement and accountability will need to be included in organizational development policies, strategies, plans and budgets.
- **Programmes and operations** will need to include community engagement and accountability in all phases of programme management, including budgeting and decision-making processes.
- Cooperation between components of the Movement will need to be guided by community-engagement and accountability commitments.
- **Staff and volunteers** will require training, support and assistance to follow good practices in community engagement and accountability when working with communities.
- Strategies will be required to document learning, share knowledge and systematically scale up community engagement and accountability across the Movement over the next four years.

The resolution is ambitious in terms of the scale and scope of the proposed changes. Nevertheless, there is already a strong foundation for community engagement and accountability rooted in the Fundamental Principles and reflected in how National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC work. The resolution simply builds on this, with the aim of helping the Movement better address the needs and priorities of vulnerable and affected people, protecting their rights and achieving better results for them.