

FAO Somalia: Accountability to Affected Populations in practice

The Technical Cooperation project “*Improving Nutrition and Food Security in the most vulnerable communities of Gedo, Bay and Bakool Regions*” was formulated as an emergency response to the poor nutrition and food security situation in Somalia in 2002. The objective of the project was to improve the nutritional status of the most vulnerable households through rapid impact food security micro projects at community level, as well as the promotion of better practices for improved nutrition.

This example of FAO’s project from more than a decade ago, highlights how a number of elements of good AAP practice were embedded in FAO programmes already at a time when Accountability to Affected Population hadn’t been an institutionalized concept¹.

In this case FAO team put in place a number of methodologies to be accountable to and include populations in the programme that are worth highlighting and sharing.

High insecurity and the consequent difficulties in accessing project sites was one of the main constraints to the implementation of the project. The strategy adopted was to deliver activities through local field staff who were able to access the project areas at all times, following a remote management model². This approach, alongside the flexibility left to the design of each single micro project, resulted in a number of different activities tailored to local contexts and needs, in line with good AAP practices.

The delivery involved examples of specific AAP approaches that demonstrate how AAP practices were practically applied and could be adopted in contexts as complex as the Somalia one.

Some examples are highlighted below:

Commitment 1: Strengthening leadership and governance to embed good practice within the organisation’s management structures and to ensure that FAO’s staff and implementing partners deliver on its commitments;

- The project participants selection process, as well as the job descriptions for local workers, were discussed with and agreed upon in consultation with local NGO partners.
- Subject matter experts (for beekeeping, honey production, food technology or green mill, for example) were recruited locally to meet specific technical needs

Commitment 2: Greater and more routine transparency, two-way communication, and information provision for affected communities;

- A local selection committee composed by project participants was involved in the selection process of the field staff
- NGOs selection process was carried out involving local communities

¹ In 2011, FAO has endorsed 7 commitments, based on the 5 IASC commitments on AAP. Further information can be found here: <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/163301/>

² For further information on AAP in Remote Access/Management contexts see the FAO paper “Accountability to Affected Populations in Limited to No-Access Zones” here: <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/accountability-to-affected-populations/en/>

Commitment 3: offer means for communities to provide feedback on programmes and to submit complaints, and to ensure that they receive a timely response;

- Direct contact between NGOs, FAO field staff and communities during the design and the delivery of the activities allowed quick response to emerging and realistic issues.

Commitment 4: Enable fair and representative participation of all sections of affected populations, including the most vulnerable and marginalized

- Targeting and selection criteria for project participants were set in collaboration with the communities. For example, in a village in Gedo, the most marginalized women were identified by the villagers as those who were begging at the Mosque on Fridays.

Commitment 5: Mainstream AAP into needs assessment, design, monitoring, and evaluation activities, ensuring an appropriate focus on AAP, participation in processes and continuous learning and improvement;

- The project proposal was designed with agreement for some in-built flexibility because the exceptional circumstances in Somalia did not allow an in-depth needs analysis.
- Preparatory workshops were organized to coordinate local and international agencies and to discuss the best methodologies to apply for the response.
- Once the local workers and NGO partners were identified, discussions with stakeholders and participatory rural appraisals were carried out to identify the best intervention for each context.
- Interventions were designed with a common commitment to building on positive local practices and logics.
- An impact evaluation was carried 6 months after the end of the project and information was collected through interviews with the participants from the targeted villages.

In line with good practices in AAP, participatory workshops were held with partner NGOs and the Government in Nairobi and at local level to support security assessments and development of the best methodologies to adopt in such unstable working environments. As a result, context specific interventions were suggested and designed as the most effective approach.

Involving the local populations and committees throughout the selection process of field staff and local implementing NGOs meant that the communities were directly engaged in guiding the appointment of those they felt were best placed to lead on the projects. Furthermore, employing local experts to deliver specific activities allowed context knowledge and understanding to be retained and built on. The identification of participants carried out at micro level through the agreement of targeting and selection criteria with the communities also ensured that those with the most pressing needs were involved in the projects.

Overall, enabling participation of affected communities within all processes and stages of the project cycle improved relevance and effectiveness of the intervention.

A key aspect of this project was the high level of flexibility agreed to with regard to the design and delivery of the micro activities. Village level interventions could not be specified at proposal stage because of the low access and volatile environments in Gedo, Bakool and Bay. They were therefore designed once the field staff were in the selected locations, and when an analysis of local needs and social structures could be carried out.

Activities were varied, including, for example, training on vegetable production and nutrition, beekeeping and honey production, building and maintaining mills, cooking demonstrations, promotion of orange sweet potato through the provision of vines for bulking. In Bakool for example, six donkeys and carts were provided to thirty women in the community. The donkeys were shared in groups of five women to generate income and allow them to maintain the activity and share the rest among them. Each group decided the best management strategy to fit their needs and although a similar activity was carried out in different regions, each group had their own unique implementing models.

Such approach resulted in interventions relevant to the micro context and needs, allowing community differences to be taken into account. Such flexibility also permitted projects to respond to emerging and realistic issues as they were rising. The intervention's sustainability was strengthened by building on local coping mechanism and successful examples.

The project approach could be defined as an effort to adapt interventions to local logic and practices and to employ existing social structures to deliver activities rather than importing or creating new ones.