Accountability to Affected Populations and Partnerships Report
FAO Cambodia programme

Background

The current industry approach to AAP encourages humanitarian actors to be diligent in ensuring that the significant power they hold with regards to disaster-affected communities is exercised responsibly at every level of the system. It promotes an underlying tenet that people affected by emergencies are end users and stakeholders rather than "beneficiaries" of humanitarian assistance, that they have a fundamental right to shape efforts to assist them, and that humanitarian actors have a duty to respond to people's expressions of their rights and needs [1].

In line with the 2011 decisions of the IASC Principals, FAO has acknowledged the fundamental importance of accountability to affected populations (AAP). Along with peer member agencies of the IASC, FAO agreed to integrate accountability to affected populations into its statements of purpose as well as policies. FAO has seven Commitments to integrate accountability to affected populations into its statements of purpose as well as policies and practices.

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[1] Response might include, for e.g. adjusting programmes to the extent possible, investigating allegations, providing supplementary information, explaining limitations, informing communities of the outcomes of their feedback or complaints

FAO has committed to:

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;

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

3. Offer means for communities to provide **feedback** on programmes and to submit **complaints**, and to ensure that they receive a timely **response**;

4. Enable fair and representative **participation** of all sections of affected populations, including the most vulnerable and marginalised;

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;

6. Prevent **sexual exploitation and abuse** (SEA) by FAO personnel and implementing partners and put in place adequate response mechanisms[2];

7. Collaborate with peers and partners to deliver on AAP commitments in a coordinated and coherent way.

Accountability

In a broad sense, accountability means "responsibility for actions". FAO defines AAP as:

> *"an active commitment by actors and organisations to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by, the people they seek to assist."[3]*

Delivering aid accountably involves rethinking policy and practice from a human, and human rights, perspective and making a commitment to respecting and preserving the dignity of the people an agency seeks to assist. Best practice in accountability is facilitated by an articulation of the optimal scenario through the use of agreed industry standards and adaption of this to local circumstances and restraints, while endeavouring to continually improve and build on good practice. Doing AAP well goes hand in hand with positive practices in, for example, gender, protection, HIV/AIDS and disability. It is also widely argued that enabling the participation of disaster affected communities throughout all stages of the programme cycle improves the effectiveness of humanitarian programmes and therefore their impact and outcomes. Well functioning accountability systems help to ensure that programmes meet identified needs while reducing the possibility of error, corruption and the need for complaint.

Through the IASC Sub Group on Accountability to Affected Populations, a draft Operational Framework was developed, designed to assist implementing agencies both individually and in groups to find practical entry points for improving accountability to affected populations across the project cycle. As an adjunct to this, an analysis tool was developed to assist organisations to design

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[2] FAO PSEA Workplan 2012-2013
[3] Adapted from HAP International; http://www.hapinternational.org

accountability improvements and mechanisms according to an internal analysis of their particular strengths and weaknesses against current industry standards and guidance. The tool synthesises current industry standards, such as the HAP Standard, the Sphere Core Standards, and the People in Aid Code, with the Global Humanitarian Platform's Principles of Partnership, CDA's Do No Harm Framework and the draft IASC operational framework, and structures them under the framework of the CAAP. This analysis of FAO's Cambodia programme uses this analysis tool.

The Analysis Exercise

With the assistance of the country team and in particular the focal point, Mr Etienne Careme, a week long programme of interviews, meetings and observation was undertaken by Dr Barb Wigley and Ms Martina Buonincontri in May 2012, to make an assessment of the programme's strengths and gaps against current industry standards on accountability to affected populations (AAP) and partnerships as they pertain to the provision of accountable and quality services to communities. It was acknowledged that the country programme had not to date been deliberately following standards on accountability to affected populations, and therefore it should not be seen as a monitoring or evaluation exercise of an implemented plan, but rather an exploration of existing good practice and potential avenues for strengthening.

The programme included interviews and meetings with:
- FAO Staff and teams covering the following functions:
  - FAO Representative Officer in Charge
  - Administration
  - Emergency programme (floods response and support to other emergency projects)
  - Programme team
  - Project managers, CTAs and staff of several projects, including Avian Influenza, Food Security Information, Food Security and Nutrition
- 4 community groups in Kong Pisey, Prey Veng and SveyRieng provinces
- Representatives from 3 NGO partners
- Representatives from the Provincial Department of Women's affairs in the 3 provinces visited
- Representatives from the Provincial Department of Agriculture in the 3 provinces visited
- The Director of the Department of Animal Health and Production in Phnom Penh

Interviews were semi structured, using the accountability analysis tool as a framework to collect data against the 5 commitments of the IASC Principals on AAP and on partnership. The programme commenced with an all-staff briefing to orient to the project, and also ended with an all-staff feedback and findings session on the final afternoon. During the week, in addition to the interviews and focus group discussions, we attended a seed distribution in one of the provinces, and took the opportunity to interview recipients, the NGO staff coordinating the distribution and the local government officials attending the distribution ceremony. In some meetings further documents were requested as relevant, to assist in the preparation of the more comprehensive report.

Towards the end of the week we reviewed our notes and prepared a preliminary overview of findings to share with the team on the final afternoon. The purpose of this session included to test theories and suppositions and encourage discussion and debate regarding the findings. In brief, feedback given to the team indicated that good and excellent practice examples against all of the commitments were found (Leadership, Transparency, Feedback and Complaints, Participation, Design, M&E). As expected, practice is inconsistent and therefore relies upon the skills and approaches of individuals rather than being institutionalised through policy and guidance. We shared examples where we felt the addition of basic practices of AAP could improve outcomes and

examples where it seemed evident that some approaches to certain elements, such as beneficiary selection, targeting and project design, caused disharmony and increased hardship in some communities. Feedback from partners was consistently positive, and the level of skill among the team in handling complex partner relationships was noted. The LoA process in the country appears to be fair, transparent and consistent, giving all potential partners the opportunity to present their projects to FAO.

A draft report was prepared and shared with the country team, who provided feedback and factual corrections, which were incorporated into the final report.

We felt that the analysis exercise was extremely fruitful, and very much appreciated the efforts of the Cambodia programme staff to ensure that everything ran as smoothly as possible, including the preparatory work that was done prior to our arrival to enable a satisfactory number of interviews with partners and communities. The staff teams were on the whole open and candid about their opinions and experience, which was essential for us in drawing meaningful conclusions that would eventually be of value to the team. We appreciated the skill and expertise of the team in the work that they do, and look forward to continuing to work with them to devise some pioneering work in AAP at FAO.

More detailed findings are grouped under the headings of the 5 commitments on accountability to affected populations, plus an additional heading on working with partners. Detailed indicators from the analysis tool are reproduced here to organize the report and provide an overview of AAP. Some of the indicators have little or no feedback against them, as they were either not entirely relevant in this situation, beyond the control of the country programme, or we did not find the evidence needed to comment.

Recommendations are provided at the end of each section, and the most key ones are reproduced just below. It is not envisaged that there will be resources or capacity to respond to each and every recommendation. Rather, any logical recommendation or conclusion, based on the findings, is recorded to provide an overview of what would need to be in place to be more fully in line with the CAAP and current industry standards. As a result of further discussion, priorities may then be established, with a realistic plan of action outlined to enable the programme to move forward in AAP. Some of the findings and recommendations pertain more to responsibilities at headquarters.

Completed or Proposed Next Steps:

- A written version of the preliminary findings was shared with the team soon after the mission as a summary of initial thoughts.
- A draft report was prepared and shared with the country programme for feedback.
- Discussions will take place to agree on what concrete actions the team will take and what support they will receive in doing so.
- Progress will be reviewed and captured at an appropriate point.
- Learning from this exercise will be shared at relevant points with the rest of the organisation.

Key Recommendations

- Existing engagement with affected communities in the course of projects, activities or M&E could be highlighted more to emphasise the key nature of such activities and the priority they hold with respect to the organisation's commitments.

- Different methods for exploring distribution of projects and beneficiary targeting and selection could be explored, and include community consultation. Successful ways could then be reflected in project documentation and guidance to help improve practice more widely in the organisation.
- That the team capture and record some of their good practice and build them into local guidance, providing clear expectations as to quality and minimum standards.
- Some minimum levels and types of information could be agreed upon for routine dissemination to communities, in addition to the development of strategies in consultation with communities to create information resources that are appropriate for them.
- Consider how distribution of project information could bypass party politics and ensure that social divisions and dynamics do not determine participation in FAO supported projects.
- Consider whether new technologies are being exploited to their full potential to enable feedback and communication with communities. It was mentioned that most people have mobile phones, and projects such as that with the Agricultural Markets Office (AMO) could be exploited more. However equality of access to phones between women and men would need to be assessed.
- Review of the nutritious feeding programme, and perhaps conduct some community consultations to come up with a new model that could be shared more widely in FAO.
- Establishment of a couple of small pilot complaints mechanisms to test good practice in complaints handling in Cambodia.
- Along with organisational guidance being developed at HQ, it could be of value to develop some unifying guidance on participation for the Cambodia programme, which could then be contextualised to take into account social and political considerations in different provinces.
- Ensure that communities have more participation in the design of projects, and that projects demonstrate that they take into account their daily activities and responsibilities.
- Identify affected communities as stakeholders of projects.
- Address the barriers to free contribution of feedback and opinions by different interest groups.
- A greater consistency of AAP in M&E practice and methodology, and demonstrated application of learning from findings and the good practice examples could be of benefit.
- Document local expectations on the part of FAO staff in negotiating and managing partnerships
- Explore means for the inclusion of AAP at a local level in partnership agreements.

Commitment 1: LEADERSHIP/GOVERNANCE

Demonstrate their commitment to accountability to affected populations by ensuring feedback and accountability mechanisms are integrated into country strategies, programme proposals, monitoring and evaluations, recruitment, staff inductions, trainings and performance management, partnership agreements, and highlighted in reporting.

This commitment is very much influenced at a headquarters level in FAO, and therefore cannot be seen as entirely within the control of the country programme. However, some general comments are made here in relation to the indicators below that apply to the organisation as a whole, with the addition of some Cambodia specific examples. It should be noted however, that the indicators in this section were not investigated thoroughly, as the focus of the week was more predominantly on commitments 2 – 4, and partnerships.

1.1.   *The organisation sets out the commitments that it will be held accountable for, and how they will be delivered, guiding the management of accountability within the organisation and allowing all stakeholders, including the women, men, girls and boys it aims to assist, to hold the organisation to account for its commitments.*

Through its participation in the IASC Principals' decisions of 2011, FAO has made a number of commitments on accountability to affected populations. These commitments have been drafted into a statement but have not yet been made publicly available or communicated to staff.

1.2.   *The organisation has a publicly available statement of these commitments (accessible in formats suitable for different stakeholder groups). This statement should:*
- *Demonstrate that the organisation is aware of its stakeholders, and identifies the people it seeks to assist as key stakeholders*
- *Have clear reference to the accountability commitments of the organisation towards this group*
- *Include commitments under each of the five IASC commitments, and commitments with respect to working with partners*
- *Show the processes by which the organization intends to implement, monitor and improve against its commitments*

As above, this is in the early stages and should be driven by HQ for a consistent approach, with local commitments and variations or adaptations made.

1.3.   *The organisation ensures accountability to affected populations is integrated into relevant and key organisational processes and documentation, such as; assessments, country strategies, programme and project proposals, monitoring and evaluations, recruitment, staff inductions, trainings and performance management, partnership agreements, reporting, cluster performance framework.*

This is an ongoing process at Headquarters as a part of the AAP project, and will start to filter through to country programmes over time.

The Cambodia programme shared a number of documents, including M&E and project reports that indicated some good to excellent practices with respect to community involvement or consultation. However, these practices and consequent findings were often not highlighted as they might have been, as though this was done but not recognised as significant.

Some staff expressed a degree of confidence that procurement systems are robust and guard somewhat against corruption, however noted that the thoroughness of the systems can slow down the process to undesirable levels.

Staff noted that many of the good practice examples we came across in AAP are reliant on the skills and conviction of individuals and weren't captured in policy to ensure their transfer amongst colleagues. Good practices are, however often taught and handed down from more experienced staff to their colleagues.

A consequence of the absence of an expectation of AAP in assessment and planning processes can be illustrated through the issue of beneficiary targeting and selection, which came up many times during the mission. There seemed to be a number of embedded assumptions within the establishment of projects with regard to, for example, how to distribute limited resources over a large area, and how to target beneficiaries of projects. Selection criteria are discussed between some of the stakeholders at the beginning of a project or distribution and may be reviewed based on experience during implementation, although must remain in line with the stated outcome in the project document. Targeting is often based on people being assessed as "the most poor", or the "most vulnerable", or sometimes, those who had the time or the motivation to participate in a project, or a mix of all. When overall, many or most people are relatively poor, these distinctions and

how people are selected may be experienced as somewhat arbitrary, and may not take many other factors into account. An evaluation of one programme highlighted that targeting the most poor became problematic when many of these people had been forced to leave their villages in search of income.

The assumptions did not always appear a comfortable fit with individual circumstances, and as we were told on a number of occasions, the methods of targeting and announcing beneficiary selection often caused conflict in communities. People told us that their neighbours were "angry" and "jealous" because they hadn't been selected, and the partner staff, not knowing how to handle this situation, said that they promised people they would be selected next time, when they knew that may not be true. FAO staff noted that the jealousy between project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is far less when the selection criteria are clearly explained and understood by each level of the social structure, including by village, commune, district and community representatives. It was also reported that on the whole the staff of the Provincial Department of Agriculture are aware of this issue and use their close and long term relationships with the communities to exercise diplomacy.

There are occasions when some village chiefs refuse to participate in distributions of agricultural inputs such as seeds. It seems there are a range of reasons for this to occur, including, as was reported to us, the potential for discord within their communities as a result of selective targeting. In addition, however, FAO staff were aware of other motivations for refusal to participate, including that the distribution would not benefit their circle of family and friends, or because the financial and time cost of participating in the distribution and associated ceremony was beyond their means. One staff suggested that in each situation, the reasons should be uncovered in order that they may be addressed if possible.

A monitoring report outlines a process of selection that was carried out in several steps, starting with commune level discussions on the criteria, followed by village chiefs conducting the first cut of the selection. A partner agency verified the selection through household visits, confirming that many households were selected erroneously. This may have meant that people believed they had been selected and were then removed from the list. The final list was then posted for 5 days in villages, with the express purpose of allowing time for feedback and complaints. This example highlights a number of AAP issues. In addition to the potential for people to believe they had been selected and then to have had their hopes dashed, there appear to have been open opportunities for village chiefs to attempt to bias selection. While communities did not seem to have input into how the criteria for the project should be set, and therefore it is proposed that the criteria were based on assumptions that may have benefited from some challenging, the ensuing process aimed to be thorough, and accountability was practiced when communities were given ample opportunities to have a say about the results and to make complaints.

As a cross reference to the commitment on participation, we did come across some examples where selection was done differently. While we weren't able to verify the accuracy of the story told, a partner staff member recounted a process in one province where they travelled from village to village and invited each entire village to sit together with them and discuss how best to manage the limited resources. We were told that in these discussions, people suggested who would most benefit and volunteered for certain community members to have the places. As a consequence, we were told, there has not been a problem with discord in these villages.

1.4. *The organisation has a means / strategy for managing risk when working within insecure environments that both protects staff and enables a continual striving to attain whatever level possible of accountability to affected populations, even when access to them is limited.*

N/A

The organisation recognises that both accountability to affected populations and operational effectiveness are dependent on accountability to, and support of, staff, volunteers and consultants. Relevant indicators include the following:

1.5.   A clear definition and documentation, including through updated job descriptions, of the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that staff need to do their jobs effectively and to meet the organisation's commitments.

AAP has not yet been incorporated into FAO's job descriptions.

1.6.   Teams are recruited with attention to a balance of women and men, cultural diversity and age.

The Cambodia programme seemed to have a strong mix of age and gender, including women at a senior level, and cultural diversity amongst the international staff. However we omitted to enquire as to whether this was deliberate or by chance.

1.7.   Staff, volunteers and consultants, both national and international, are provided with adequate and timely inductions, briefings, and clear reporting lines that promote positive organisational behaviours and enable staff to understand their responsibilities, work objectives, organisational values, accountability commitments, key policies and local context.

There are some very detailed orientation programmes for FAO staff offered at HQ, which provide staff with a wide range of information. International staff in Cambodia in particular noted that before being posted to the country, they received a half day briefing on corruption

1.8.   The organisation provides appropriate management, supervisory and psychosocial support to staff.

While we didn't investigate this in detail across the whole programme, we observed positive management practices and this was backed up by comments.

1.9.   Management policies, procedures and training equip managers to implement policies effectively and to prepare and support staff in carrying out their role effectively, to develop their potential and to encourage and recognise good performance.

1.10.   A formal mechanism for reviewing staff performance exists, is clearly understood, and is used regularly and effectively.

There appeared to be agreement amongst the staff team that performance feedback was inadequate for most staff, whether regular staff or consultants. Examples had been given of consultants receiving performance reviews via email prior to the fairly recent implementation of the PEMS.

1.11.   A process for continual staff development exists that encourages staff and managers to jointly identify learning needs and that ensures accountability and quality commitments are met more effectively.

Staff talked about a range of training opportunities, although some felt there could be more. They also noted that workshops and meetings are held which help to share ideas and experience with others and to improve quality and support.

1.12. *A code of conduct exists that explicitly addresses protection of people the agency seeks to assist from sexual abuse, corruption, exploitation and other human rights violations, and:*
  - *The code specifically refers to staff, volunteers and partners not exploiting and abusing people, and the responsibility of staff to report abuses*
  - *The codes are shared with affected communities so that they know what to hold workers, partner staff and volunteers to account for*
  - *Safe and effective grievance procedures exist and the agency takes appropriate disciplinary action against workers following confirmed violation of the code of conduct*

At the moment the FAO Code of Conduct does not specifically prohibit sexual exploitation and abuse, and is not shared with partners or communities. However addressing the first of these points is in the PSEA (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) work plan for the organisation, and therefore this will filter down.

1.13. *The organisation, including its Human Resources section, plans in advance for adequate surge capacity during a response, putting in place Standard Operating Procedures, commitment of resources and deployment of staff, including staff with a mandate and skills to institute and improve quality and accountability.*

Recommendations

- That any engagement with affected communities in the course of projects or activities be highlighted to emphasise the key nature of such activities.

- Incorporate AAP into any documentation that can be influenced locally as a standard format (support for this could be provided from HQ).

- Different methods for exploring distribution of projects and beneficiary targeting and selection could be explored, and include community consultation. Successful ways could then be reflected in project documentation and guidance to help improve practice more widely in the organisation.

- AAP could be incorporated into local job descriptions over the cycle of updating them so that the particular role of any member of staff in upholding the organisation's commitments on AAP is articulated in their job description. This would also mean that as AAP is built more into the programme cycle, responsibilities for maintaining particular aspects of it would be reflected in job descriptions over time.

- That the team capture some of their good practices and build them into local guidance.

Commitment 2: TRANSPARENCY
Provide accessible and timely information to affected populations on organizational procedures, structures and processes that affect them to ensure that they can make informed decisions and choices, and facilitate a dialogue between an organisation and its affected populations over information provision.

2.1.   The organisation defines and documents expectations and processes for sharing information with all stakeholders, including the people the organisation seeks to assist.

This is not yet the case in FAO, and therefore staff in this programme are not operating under any clear guidance as to minimum expectations.

2.2.   The organisation and their partners talk to the people they seek to assist about their information needs and preferences for channels and means of communication from the initial assessment phase, and demonstrate a commitment to routinely providing accessible and timely information to the affected population about:
- *The humanitarian agency, its accountability commitments, code of conduct, complaints procedure and relevant contact details*
- *Projects, including goals and objectives, expected results, timeframe, summary of finances and evaluation/ progress reports*
- *People's rights and entitlements*
- *Processes that affect them to ensure that they can make informed decisions and choices,*
- *Staff roles and responsibilities*
- *Criteria for selecting target groups*
- *Feedback from participatory processes*
- *How the organisation can be held accountable for meeting its stated commitments.*

Communities spoken to seemed in general to be aware of the existence of FAO, but some communities did not know much more than the name and very scant information appeared to be readily available.

There were a number of examples of good practice in the provision of critical information at the whole of village level, however this didn't seem to be a standard practice. Often it appeared that basic programme information was shared, but little else. Community members reported being well informed about projects before deciding whether to participate.

We were told that in many cases, information is disseminated along the line of the governmental structures and stops at either commune or village chief level. As a result, information is at times used as a tool of power, where, for example, villagers do not always have fair or accurate access to information (distribution lists being posted on the inside of a chief's house, for e.g.).

2.3.   The organisation ensures that its staff members identify themselves to the people they aim to assist and other stakeholders.

In the sample of community visits, it appeared that the communities were familiar with the FAO and partner staff.

2.4.   Information is presented in languages, formats and media that are appropriate for, accessible to, and can be understood by the people it aims to assist and other stakeholders, making use of a range of relevant methods, from new technologies to simple face to face or written methods, including methods already being used.

In relation to communication on specific projects, for example, the avian influenza programme, we heard of a number of excellent examples, showing ingenuity and the use of multimedia approaches, including mass meetings, movies and posters.

2.5.   The organisation collaborates with and supports other relevant organisations to implement multi-agency and multi-disciplinary communications initiatives that deliver at a response wide level.

The country office has some interagency information projects running that focus on strengthening governance, and which operate down to the commune level. This indicated a level of expertise and technical knowledge that exists and which could potentially be exploited in a process of improving information dissemination for communities on other levels. Technologies that the communities have access to are being exploited, such as local radio and sms trainings, therefore representing good practice on a number of levels.

Recommendations

- Some minimum levels of information could be agreed upon for routine dissemination to communities, and strategies be developed, in consultation with communities, to create information resources that are appropriate for them.

- Create a system for distribution of project information that bypasses party politics and ensures that social divisions and dynamics do not determine participation in FAO supported projects.

- The expertise and experience gained in the mass communication projects could be shared and capitalised upon across specialist fields, to apply communications ingenuity to agriculture projects.

Commitment 3: FEEDBACK and COMPLAINTS

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

3.1.   The organisation defines, documents and implements expectations and the processes through which it will enable women, men, boys and girls that it aims to assist, and other stakeholders, to provide and receive feedback.

Opportunities exist to gain feedback from farmers at events such as Farmers' Field Days and through monitoring visits, which seem to occur on a regular basis. Examples were also given of household surveys being used to gather feedback, although it was also noted in one location that nothing much changed as a result of the feedback. Good practice examples were noted of regular monthly meetings with farmer groups to discuss progress, in addition to the example given above of communities being given 5 days to give feedback and raise complaints following the selection for a project.

On the other hand, community members across all provinces visited had feedback regarding a particular project, the nutritious feeding programme that seemed significant enough to warrant considering changes to the programme design. There is nothing to say that earlier consultation would have highlighted these problems, however consultation both before and during the project could certainly have brought to light some potentially flawed assumptions that appear to be creating difficulty for most participants. Every group we asked reported an almost zero compliance rate with the programme, saying things such as, it was too expensive to buy the nutritious food, preparing

extra meals took up too much time, or the food supplements made people sick. With such a low take up rate in the programme, it seems a rethinking of how to get the message across is required.

3.2.   The organisation ensures that stakeholders, including the communities they seek to assist, partners and staff, have safe, accessible and confidential entry points through which they can raise complaints, and that the means by which they can lodge their complaints and receive a response are appropriate to the context and based upon their expressed preferences, as outlined during consultation.

Some people reported a kind of cultural confusion between complaining about things and being ungrateful, and many felt this would get in the way of community members exercising their right to complain. This presents the team with a dilemma as to how to wrestle with and work around cultural nuances so that people have a voice and can be seen as grateful at the same time.

Despite the belief that people are reluctant to complain, there were also many examples of people complaining. One government worker said that he records complaints made in a notebook, but he had no system to deal with them beyond "seeing what he could do". There have been other attempts to address complaints, and particularly through the government scheme of transparency boxes. We heard stories, however of these boxes being placed in inappropriate and non-confidential places, undermining the spirit of the scheme.

Examples were given of people waiting for extended periods until an international staff member visited their area in order to pass complaints or concerns along. This seemed to be connected with fear regarding the dynamics of party politics, and again highlights the importance of FAO and partners struggling to separate their processes and procedures from biased political structures.

Without a formal system in place with clear information as to the boundaries of complaints that FAO and its partners can deal with, staff receive complaints on matters they are unable to deal with. This poses some reputational risk when communities develop the impression that the agency is not responsive.

Some communities reported that they didn't have a contact person and they didn't know where to report problems with crops and livestock, although not every group appeared to have this problem. A couple of groups noted that they had submitted proposals and had not received feedback on them after a period of months. While timely responses to proposals are a government role, it might be something that could be addressed in partnership agreements.

In communes, we were told, there is a community facilitator and farmers can report to them if they have a complaint. They might do that by phone, and apparently most people have phones. Although, it was noted that very few use this channel, which may indicate that they don't trust it. In some locations it was felt that people choose to report concerns to the female representatives on the community committees created to manage the agriculture projects.

In one area we were told that people who complained about the selection criteria had it explained to them during house to house visits, which seemed a good practice example (regardless of the recommendation to change the process of setting and communicating selection criteria).

3.3.   The organisation defines, documents and implements procedures for receiving, processing and responding to complaints, and has systems in place to ensure that:
   - *The complaints and response procedures specify processes for handling sensitive and non-sensitive complaints*

- *All parties understand the complaints procedures*
- *Complaints are handled in line with procedures*
- *Procedures anticipate the handling of complaints ranging from every day programme issues, to allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse and corruption*
- *The information the organisation gathers by handling complaints is used to improve practice and learn*
- *Staff understand their responsibility to report abuse they become aware of*
- *Staff understand how to manage sensitive information*

So far there are no formal procedures in place, and complaints are handled in the ad hoc ways described above.

Recommendations

- Consider whether new technologies are being exploited to their full potential to enable feedback and communication with communities. It was mentioned that most people have mobile phones, and projects such as that with the Agricultural Markets Office (AMO) could be exploited more. However equality of access to phones between women and men would need to be assessed.

- Review of the nutritious feeding programme, and perhaps conduct some community consultations to come up with a new model that could be shared more widely in FAO.

- Establishment of a couple of small pilot complaints mechanisms to test good practice in complaints handling in Cambodia.

- Negotiate with partners regarding timeliness of response.

Commitment 4: PARTICIPATION

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

4.1.   *The organisation defines, documents and implements expectations and processes through which it will:*
- *Identify the people it aims to assist and their representatives, referring to gender, age, diversity, and special needs*
- *Enable women, men, boys and girls that it aims to assist, including representation across diverse needs groups, and other stakeholders, to participate in and influence initial assessment, project design, deliverables, criteria for selecting target groups and the selection process, project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation*
- *Ensure that systems of community representation are fair and representative, and that the most marginalised, vulnerable and affected have a voice*

It was noted that participatory approaches have been influenced by the resources available from FAO on participation. While these excellent resources are no longer being updated, guidance on participation within an AAP framework at an organisational level is in draft.

There was a wide range of participatory approaches, from good practice to very limited. Good practice examples included whole of community involvement in needs assessment, and the self-organisation of farmers' groups and their system of preparing and submitting proposals. The process

of putting together these groups was impressive and people seemed fairly consistently satisfied with how it worked. The committees set up through FAO and partner projects generally operate outside of the local commune structure, and also for that reason they work quite well. Equal numbers of men and women are selected from each village and it was reported that it has notably changed attitudes towards women in leadership positions.

In addition, an excellent example was given of a process employed for reassessing the relevance of identified needs through conducting focus group discussions, trans walks, and speaking with randomly selected groups of women, men and children. In some place house-to-house visits were used to finalise beneficiary selection, ensuring that mistakes had not been made. Another good practice example was reported by a partner, and has been described earlier under commitment 1, when they spoke to people either individually or as a whole village group, and negotiated the selection of households against the resources available.

In terms of more limited practice, there is often an over-reliance on village heads as the primary source of community representation, without a view of the diversity of interest groups within those communities. Numerous examples were given where consultation ended at the level of the local authorities and the village chiefs. For example, in an assessment document shared with us, it was reported that due to having identified their key informants as local authorities and village heads, it was possible to define livelihood zones, but not to define the target beneficiaries because they were not able to provide detailed information on the livelihood structure of the community. As a result, they needed to conduct additional focus group discussions.

Project staff are faced with a dilemma of whether to use or work around existing governmental and political structures of representation that can be marred by corruption and party politics. We were told that communes may be ranked according to political affiliations, which can also influence the level of service they receive. This further diminishes the validity of viewing people caught in or bound by these systems of operation as reliable informants as to the needs and opinions of their communities.

In the earlier project example described under commitment 1, where beneficiary selection was done over a number of steps, the evaluation report highlighted that as this project was an emergency response for a 4-month period, the partners did not have enough time to conduct a smooth targeting process. They reported finding the targeting very difficult and admitted that a lot of errors had been made. In addition, it was found that targeting of the poorest households was challenged by their need to move to find immediate income.

In another report, it is noted that a number of potential project stakeholders were identified, however, the communities that were the subject of the project were not seen in this group. It may seem a semantic issue, but the routine identification of the beneficiaries of a project as primary stakeholders of the project can shift attitudes, assumptions and assist in strengthening AAP approaches.

4.2.   Communities are informed about assessments in advance and community representatives are invited to participate in conducting them.

4.3.   The organisation takes active steps to be aware of and take into due consideration local culture, customs, beliefs, capacity and strategies to survive with dignity. In addition, where relevant, an understanding of the "Do No Harm" concepts of dividers, tensions, connectors and local capacities for peace is sought, including through the participation of communities in

this analysis, and integrated within planning and design of projects and the humanitarian response.

The Cambodia relief programme is integrated within the overall programme, and the staff of both development and humanitarian programmes appear to interact regularly. A large proportion of the staff group are highly experienced and competent local staff, with clearly a wealth of local and professional knowledge between them. We were impressed by the congenial and trusting relationships they had developed with partners and communities and it is evident that the country programme benefits from the expertise they bring with them.

The tensions and conflict created by programming choices regarding targeting and selection could be rethought using some kind of "Do No Harm" analysis.

It was reported that women have complained that they are quite burdened by their additional workload when they participate in programmes. On this theme, it was also a reason given why most participants did not adhere to the nutritious feeding guidelines.

4.4.   The organisation understands and takes into account contextual factors that may enhance or inhibit free and open speech on the part of separate interest groups.

There was an understanding of the political pressures and structures that affected the freedom of people to speak up and make complaints about corruption and unfair practices. There are, at present, insufficient strategies in place to compensate for this.

Consultation processes described took into account the need to speak to women separately in order to gain their views more freely. Consultation in general, utilising these kinds of practices, could happen more extensively and routinely.

Recommendations

- Along with organisational guidance being developed at HQ, it could be of value to develop some unifying guidance on participation for the Cambodia programme, that could then be contextualised to take into account social and political considerations in different provinces.

- Analyse beneficiary and targeting from the perspective of "Do No Harm", whether it is the formal framework, or something adapted to the circumstances.

- Ensure that communities have more participation in the design of projects, and that projects demonstrate that they take into account their daily activities and responsibilities.

- Identify affected communities as stakeholders of projects.

- Address the barriers to free contribution of feedback and opinions by different interest groups.

Commitment 5: DESIGN, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programmes with the involvement of affected populations, feeding learning back into the organisation on an ongoing basis and reporting on the results of the process

5.1.   Programme design strives to enhance the capacity of affected people to prevent, minimise or better cope with the effects of future hazards. This includes the early communication of the organisation's exit strategy.

Building resilience to better cope with future hazards appears to be an integral concern of FAO projects. Methods employed to ensure and measure successful outcomes through accountable practices could be strengthened.

Design processes did not seem to include community input after needs assessment. The team heard of a few examples where lack of community participation in the design may have contributed to less than optimal outcomes or to difficulties experienced by participants, for e.g. the expense incurred by some farmers in getting to and from a distribution, the amount of time required to attend a training when other things needed to be attended to and the persistently low take up of the nutrition project method.

While there may not be clear guidance laying down such expectations, as noted, there is evidence of excellent participatory practice in all areas including evaluation, that could be modelled and standardised more across projects. An evaluation example shared outlined the use of meetings with commune councilors or village chiefs, meeting with farmers in groups, including separate women's groups, house to house visits, focus group discussions, transect walks, meetings with the Provincial Department of Agriculture, the district governor, commune councilors, partners, in addition to referring to partner documents and reports from monitoring, training and progress reports.

The report also outlined some learning consistent with AAP. Recommendations included that model farmers should be trained in each village so that other farmers could learn from them, in line with their preference to learn by doing and by seeing, and that monthly meetings among the farmers in each village are important to enable them all learn from each other and help each other to solve issues on crop production. These two findings highlight the benefits of community members learning from each other and being active agents in their own development.

Despite this methodology being strong in AAP practice, as noted in reference to reporting in general, there was not a strong sense of the farmers' voices in the body of the report. Given the number of people who were spoken to in order to conduct the evaluation, a clearer use of their opinions and feedback could have shone through. This lack of evidence of community input and involvement undermines the good work conducted.

Monitoring appears to be undertaken on a regular basis and the strong and positive relationships built with partners, including government employees, enabled this to occur in a constructive and collaborative manner. Monitoring practices included consulting with communities to verify data. Lack of a midterm review on many projects, however, may mean that there is not a chance to stand back and reflect on the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

5.5.   The organisation has a means by which it can continuously review its interventions against a "Do No Harm" framework, to ensure that its projects, programmes and interventions are not exacerbating conflict or causing harm to the people it seeks to assist.

5.6.   There are systematic means for reviewing and adapting programme strategies in response to monitoring data, changing needs and an evolving context.

There was evidence that programme strategies are adapted in accordance with monitoring data and there was also evidence that some programmes continued to utilise unsuccessful strategies despite the feedback of communities and the low success rate (the nutritious feeding programme being an example).

However, the following excellent example of monitoring practices leading to ongoing adaptation was found in an evaluation report:"There were different activities for the monitoring and evaluation during the project implementation: meeting with commune councilors or village chiefs, meeting with farmers as a group, and house to house visit. The Cambodia Organisation for Women's Support and the Provincial Department of Agriculture played very important role on these activities to ensure all the selected target areas and beneficiaries met the agreed criteria; all distribution items reached the target farmer as planned; farmers well applied knowledge from the trainings, all mistakes were adjusted on time and documented as lessons learnt, and all relevant data were collected and reported. FAO staff did field monitoring visit often to provide support, comment or feedback on performance of COWS in all activities: site and beneficiary selection, item distribution, training period, and crop production of farmers."

5.7.   The organisation strives to establish systems and agreements whereby short and longer term (positive and/or negative) effects of the humanitarian response and related projects on the affected and wider populations are monitored and measured.

As noted, evidence of excellent participatory approaches to evaluation was found, although it does not appear to be consistently applied, and where the impact of the programme was assessed and reported. Staff commented that there was inadequate long-term impact measurement, linked to the short-term nature of projects, and a limited view of sustainability.

Recommendations

- Strengthened participatory approaches in project design.

- Documentation of AAP application to design, monitoring and evaluation.

- A greater consistency of AAP in M&E practice and methodology, and demonstrated application of learning from findings and the good practice examples could be of benefit.

- Stronger reference to participatory methods used and recording of community input in reports.

- Exploration of means to increase emphasis on longer-term impact measurement.

6: WORKING WITH AND THROUGH PARTNERS

6.1.   The organisation defines, documents and implements expectations and processes by which it implements and monitors its commitment to the five GHP Principles of Partnership.

The 5 principles outline the expectation of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. All of these principles were evident in practice and verified by the partners interviewed.

Partners highlighted excellent practice with respect to consulting and collaborating with them, including attention to consultation and orientation workshops. There appeared to be strong and open communication between FAO and partners on projects and partners noted that the regular meetings were very important to them. Partners often said they had learnt very much from their relationship with FAO, and one even noted that they regard FAO as their best partnership.

Some partners referred to a past situation, when lack of skill in managing relationships on the part of just one staff member damaged a number of relationships. This highlighted the risk of not being clear on minimum skills required and expectations when it comes to partnerships, and the importance for partners (as well as communities) to know what is the very least they can expect from FAO in order to hold them to account when not meeting expectations.

6.2.   *The organisation plans and works in coordination with UN and non-UN humanitarian organisations as outlined in the POP, as well as with the relevant authorities and civil society organisations engaged in impartial humanitarian action, working together for maximum efficiency, coverage and effectiveness, and to support local capacity.*

FAO Cambodia staff demonstrated a wide range of skills in managing the complexities of partnering with government authorities. It seemed that there were challenges in managing expectations and we observed strong and positive relationships from central to provincial level. There was positive feedback on rapid and responsive action from FAO contact people when needed.

Many partners suggested field visits to learn from others, a theme that was shared by farmers and staff alike.

6.3.   *Whenever possible or relevant, the organisation participates in multisectoral, joint or inter-agency assessments, with an aim to improve the quality of assessments, ensure they consist of two-way dialogue, and to reduce the burden on affected communities who may be inundated with assessments.*

6.4.   *In addition to the principles outlined in the POP, the organisation defines and documents the process and criteria for assessing and selecting potential partners with a demonstrated commitment to accountability.*

It was found that the process for identification of NGO partners is well organized, consistent, equal, transparent, and follows the guidelines in Manual Section 507. It consists of a call for expressions of interest sent out by the project manager, followed by the review of project proposals. Selected NGOs are then invited to present their projects in more detail at the FAO office and in some cases FAO also visits the NGO's offices to verify the capacity and available structures. This last means of verification is not mandatory according to the manual, but is an excellent way to ensure that potential partners are thoroughly evaluated not only on paper but also in practice.

In the immediate aftermath of emergencies, the Cambodia office rapidly selects partners by referring to local fora such as the NGO Forum and the DRR Forum, who provide lists of pre-approved partner organizations, as well as the Provincial Departments of Agriculture. TORs for the project are then sent to the selected NGOs and the usual procedures are followed.

AAP has not yet been incorporated into organisation wide expectations in the establishment of partnerships.

6.5. *Partnership agreements explicitly refer to accountability and quality commitments, and are developed through a collaborative process whereby agreement is reached on (amongst other things):*
- *The commitments of both the organisation and their partners to the people they aim to assist and how these commitments will be met*
- *The knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that a partner's staff need to meet agreed commitments and to ensure these are reflected in a staff code of conduct*
- *How and when they will share information*
- *How the people they aim to assist will participate in different stages of the project*
- *How they will raise and handle complaints against each other in a safe and accessible way, and ways in which they will enable the people they aim to assist to raise complaints regarding each of the partners, including when partners will refer the complaint to the organisation*
- *How they will jointly monitor and evaluate programmes, the quality of the partnership, and each other's agreed performance*

The LoA appears to be an effective tool for partnerships, however as noted, AAP is not yet integrated into it at an organisational level. The LoA process in country was generally noted as transparent and consistent, giving all potential partners the opportunity to present their projects to FAO. Negotiations on beneficiary selection criteria and budget were described as fair and transparent by most, however some complained of the criteria being too restrictive and the budgets too limited. Beneficiary selection criteria are agreed jointly and the views of partners were reported to be taken fully into consideration. Partners appear to reasonably routinely consult with beneficiaries (some more extensively than others) and this reflects positively on the work and guidance of FAO. It was reported that the LoA negotiation process allows for partners to provide significant inputs and they do not feel that FAO dominates the process, although one partner suggested adding space for contingencies into the LoAs.

Government representatives interviewed expressed being satisfied with consultation processes and their ability to have input to project design. They were also impressed by the consultation meetings and orientation workshops and felt well informed and included. Government partners also expressed being anxious about the future and whether there would be more projects.

One evaluation report noted that the time consuming nature of developing an LoA for one project had a negative impact on the outcomes of the project. For example, seeds were required to be distributed before trainings could take place, which impacted on yield. Another report noted a similar theme, where it was found that progress made by the project during the reporting period was "somewhat slow and protracted largely owing to the need for clarification of institutional issues between FAO and the Government counterparts".

6.6. *The organisation initiates dialogue with donors to ensure partnership, flexibility and collaboration with regard to accountability.*

Recommendations / Follow up actions

- TCER to initiate discussions with OCEP to include a paragraph on Accountability to Affected Populations in the LoA template.

- Information acquired through the mission to inform the drafting of an SOP (and possibly a guidance manual) on partnerships in emergencies. Additional information should, however, be obtained from other countries in order to compare and identify best practices.

- Document local expectations on the part of FAO staff in negotiating and managing partnerships

- Explore means for the inclusion of AAP at a local level in partnership agreements.

Follow up activities:

The country office and HQ have agreed on two main follow up activities deriving from the recommendations in regard to participation:

1. Developing a Guidance specifically on Participation drawn from FAO Cambodia experience, capitalising on the work commenced by the country office and on the above recommendations. FAO Cambodia team will work on it with HQ support when needed, concentrating on particular issues related to each phase of the project cycle.

2. A commitment to practical application of community participation in the design of the next emergency project. The process to be recorded and learning from it to be captured for generalised learning across emergency programmes.

3. Developed a set of AAP indicators relevant to their programmes in the 2013 logical framework